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MEREDITH.

VOL. I.

MEREDITH.

BY

THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS.
1843.

MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I.

Why should I write my memoirs? is a question that has often suggested itself to me, as the notion of diverting my leisure hours by such an occupation has occurred to me. "Your experience may serve as a guide to others," whispered Vanity; but the next moment Reason observed, "No one will profit by it, and few, perhaps, will be amused by the recital; for people like to pay for the acquisition of experience, rather than to accept it as a gift from another, and truth, though sometimes stranger, is not

often so entertaining as fiction." "But although it may neither warn nor interest others," said Selfishness, "the recurring to the days of youth may bring back some portion of its gay illusions to cheer the dreary hours of age." The suggestion of the last speaker decided the undertaking; for seldom are the dictates of Selfishness slighted; and thus the book was commenced.

That my readers should become acquainted with the individual in whose company they are to pass some hours, it will be necessary for me to tell them who I am.

Born in Yorkshire, of an old and wealthy family, it was my fate to be left an orphan before I had reached my eighteenth year. I was just old enough to feel the value of a mother's love, and a more tender and affectionate one than mine could not, I believe, be found.

Of my father, I have much less agreeable recollections. He was, as I since learned,

an unfaithful husband, happier anywhere than at home, and more disposed to attribute my poor mother's patience and forbearance under the many slights she experienced from him, to an apathetic nature, or to want of love towards him, than to the real motives which dictated her conduct — namely, a perfect freedom from selfishness, joined to a sensibility which led her to prefer suffering rather than to inflict it on him, and a sweetness of temper that enabled her to conceal, if she could not vanquish, the chagrin that preyed on her heart.

It was not until his long and fatal illness that my father was able to comprehend the true character of her whose life he had ever since the first few months of their marriage embittered.

Fascinated by her beauty and softness, he was, or fancied himself, desperately in love with her. The obstacles opposed by her father, who more than suspected the selfish-

ness and libertine propensities of her admirer, increased his ardour; and wiser heads than that of an innocent and inexperienced girl of eighteen might have been deceived into a belief of the reality of his passion, so unceasing were his attentions, and so fervent were his demonstrations of attachment. On one occasion he was known to have gone three hundred miles to a ball, in order that he might dance with the lady of his love; and on another, he absolutely swam across a river when the flood was so high as not only to terrify all those who witnessed the daring exploit, but certainly to endanger his life, in order to arrive in time to secure a seat by her at dinner at a neighbouring mansion.

What young and romantic girl could resist rewarding a love that betrayed itself by such devotion?

Gentle and timid as my poor mother was, she yet ventured to plead, in answer to the

often reiterated objections of her father, the force of her lover's passion.

"It is precisely because I believe it to be only a passion that I am anxious for you to reject him," was the answer. "You know not, Edith, and I pray that you never may, the wide distance that separates passion from affection. One is like the simoon, spreading ruin and devastation where it passes, and leaving ineffaceable traces of desolation where it has been, while the other sinks into the heart as the genial showers of spring do into the earth, awakening into life and gladness all that it pervades. Mr. Spencer Meredith is capable of entertaining a violent passion, but it would be of brief duration, and not, if I am right in my opinion of him, likely to be followed by that sober, but solid affection which replaces the delirium of love, and consoles for its departure. The woman who weds with him will be his idol during the honeymoon,

but soon after that period, will become, if not the object of his indifference, at least that of his caprices; treated with attention only when the admiration of other men reminds him of her attractions, and with comparative coldness when, as generally soon happens with such husbands, he grows oblivious of them."

My mother, who would have received the opinion of her father as the decree of an oracle on any other subject, refused to lend conviction to its wisdom on this one, the most important of her life.

Hers was not a nature to contest the point with him, or to brave his displeasure by any act of disobedience; but her pale cheek and deep dejection soon indicated to her fond and watchful parent how much her submission to his will cost her; and when, on consulting the family physician on her altered looks and want of appetite, he advised her being removed to a warmer cli-

mate, the alarmed father determined no longer to withhold his consent to a union on which, perhaps, not only the peace of his only child, but her very existence depended.

Mr. Spencer Meredith no sooner heard that the object of his affection was in delicate health, and ordered abroad, (for his visits had been lately discountenanced by my grandfather,) than he wrote to him to request to be allowed to see Miss Moyston again before she left England. The result may be easily guessed. His renewed proposal was no longer refused, his permitted addresses restored the roses of health to the cheeks of his *fiancée*, and after a few weeks he became the husband of my poor mother, who believed herself, for three months, the happiest of her sex.

Her father lived not to witness the fulfilment of his prophecy relative to mine, for he died suddenly, within four months after the marriage of his daughter, rejoicing that

he left her in the protection of the husband of her, though not of his, choice, and praying for the continuance of her happiness.

The affliction into which this unexpected event plunged my mother accelerated the change in her husband which her parent had but too well foretold would take place.

The poignant sorrow which she experienced soon exhausted the slight stock of sympathy he possessed; and when her tears still continued to flow, in spite of his caresses and common-place consolations, instead of lightening, by sharing her regret, he became impatient and offended at every demonstration of it; and observing how much her grief impaired her beauty, he angrily reproached her for its indulgence, and ended by seeking that gaiety in the houses of others no longer to be found in his own.

My mother soon discovered that she had not only lost a father, but had also to mourn for the estranged affection of a husband,

"loved not wisely, but too well." In vain did she endeavour to repress, or at least to conceal her sorrow, and assume a cheerfulness, while her heart was wrung with anguish, in the hope of winning back those attentions ever so precious to her. My father had resumed his former habits, and with them entered into new and reprehensible *liaisons*, which rendered him insensible to all his meek wife's efforts to conciliate anew his affection, and which ended by weaning him for weeks and months from his home.

Now was it that, left nearly to total solitude, and often passing many days without receiving a single line from her husband, she recalled, with bitter feelings of sorrow, the unheeded opinion and advice of her lamented father. But, alas! retrospection was as unavailing to soothe her sorrow as were her efforts to win back the truant to her love! Every womanly device of studying his taste, in the adornment of her person,

and wearing only what he had formerly admired, was resorted to, but in vain. He appeared wholly unconscious of this innocent coquetry to please him, and treated my mother with an indifference that left her, after many trials of its inefficacy, hopeless of the result of her attempts to attract him. "But God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb;" for while the nearly deserted wife, though only six months wedded, deplored the estrangement of her husband, she found herself "as ladies wish to be who love their lords." And this event not only filled her gentle heart with new and unutterable emotions of tenderness, but awakened a hope that it would, when made known to my father, revive the love he had formerly felt for her.

"He cannot be insensible to the birth of his child—our child!" would she say to herself, in the long, but now not unhappy, hours that she was left in solitude. "Oh, no! he will rejoice, as I do, and he will love

me once more for giving him this blessing! He cannot look at our child without remembering that it is a new and indissoluble bond of affection between us. Oh yes! he will love me again, and I shall be happy!"

It was with dreams and hopes like this that my poor mother cheated the hours of absence from him she loved, while he, thinking only of his pleasures, and pursuing a heartless course of intrigue, seldom bestowed a thought on her, or when he did, mentally accused her of coldness of heart and want of spirit, for submitting so patiently to his open neglect.

"I will not write this blessed news to him," would she say; "no, I will keep it for our meeting, and he will press me to his heart when I have whispered it to him."

She forgot, at the moment, that to write to her husband would be impossible, as she was left in total ignorance of his "whereabouts," and consequently knew not where

to address a letter to him; but this fact, as well as many other painful and humiliating ones, she ceased to remember in the overwhelming joy of the certainty of becoming a mother.

When at length my father did return to his long deserted home, my mother was within a few days of her accouchement. Her joyful emotions at again beholding him were quickly damped by his exclamation of surprise at the alteration in her shape, and of dissatisfaction at the cause.

The anticipations that had cheered months of solitude, and enabled her to bear up against neglect, were dashed to the earth in a moment; and tears, bitter tears of disappointment, filled those eyes so lately sparkling with joy and hope.

"Why do you weep?" asked her husband. "I am not angry at your being *enceinte*, I am only sorry; for I had hoped that we should not have a family for at

least some years. Children are both expensive and troublesome, and having a son to push one from one's place in society, or, at best, to elbow one in it, is a consummation I have never devoutly wished for. But it can't be helped; and, after all, you may give me a daughter instead of a son, which would be much less objectionable; so do not cry, for I have a horror of seeing tears!"

It was long before my poor mother could obey the injunction of her lord and master, for her tears continued to flow for some hours; but she sought the privacy of her chamber to conceal them, and met him at dinner with a calm demeanour, though the paleness of her cheek would have revealed, to any one interested in the discovery, the mental suffering of the last few hours.

How often during that day did she remember the warning given by her fond father, and wish that she had been guided by his advice; for no longer could she conceal

from herself that her husband was wholly and incurably selfish. The consciousness of having, by our own self-will and obstinacy, incurred a heavy punishment, which might, by a deference to the wisdom of those near and dear to us, have been avoided, is a severe aggravation to it; and this she felt while writhing under the penalty of hers. But she uttered no reproach, and endeavoured to find consolation in the resolution to atone to her unborn babe for the coldness and indifference of its father, by devoting to it all that overflowing love which was so unfeelingly and rudely repulsed by him on whom it had been bestowed. And yet, in defiance of every effort to subdue it, the memory of her baffled hopes, so lately and fondly nursed, would return, and with it the bitter consciousness of their destruction, and she would feel like one who awakens from a delightful dream to discover it was but an illusion.

But though she could no more look forward to finding any sympathy in her maternal delight in the breast of him whom she had hoped would share it, and clearly saw that she had nothing to expect of revived love from the event, yet her impatience to behold the little creature that would be all and everything to her, who would console her for neglect, and people her solitude, was rather increased than diminished; and she impatiently counted the days that must intervene before the hour of trial that gave it to her longing arms.

Often, during the first days that she discovered the alienation of her husband's affection, had she, in the impatient spirit of youthful disappointment, prayed that she might be released from a life that had then been, for her, robbed of all its charms.

"*He*, too," she would say to herself, "could not be otherwise than glad of being freed from the chains of marriage, now that

he no longer values the flowers that prevented him from feeling their pressure. Yes, if I were dead, he might remember me with some portion of the tenderness he once entertained; and as I never have vexed, and never will annoy him by complaint or reproach, he will think of me with kindness, perhaps with pity. This would be better than to live for months and years unloved, uncared for, and drop at last into the grave unmourned, unwept by him, to wed whom I had wrung my father's reluctant consent."

The young, when disappointment, which waits on all, has first taught them that happiness has no resting-place on earth, turn, with a sentiment more nearly allied to impatience than resignation, to a desire for death. An early grave, in some quiet, secluded spot, has been often looked to as the oasis in the desert of life, where only rest can be found; but as we grow older, although

our cares multiply, and our hopes of earthly happiness fade, this desire for death subsides, and we smile—it is true, the smile is a pensive one—at the recollection of our youthful aspirations for an early grave. We become satisfied with much less felicity than we had in the days of youth thought necessary to render life even endurable, and learn to support privations and trials that would have then been deemed beyond our strength to bear.

CHAPTER II.

At length the prayers of the neglected wife were granted, and she became a mother; but her life nearly paid the forfeit, for, during many hours, the skilful *accoucheur* who attended despaired of saving her. The indifference of my father was evident even to him, and engendered a dislike he could neither subdue nor conceal.

The joy of seeing her child, of hearing its faint wail, and of pressing it to her heart, repaid my poor mother for all her sufferings; and if some sorrow at knowing that her joy

was unshared mingled with her maternal transports, it was counterbalanced by the delight she experienced when covering with kisses the soft cheek of her infant, as it slumbered on her bosom.

"I am glad you are doing well, Edith," said my father, as he pressed his lips on her brow, the day after my birth. Even this common-place speech was gratefully received by her who had lately been so unaccustomed to meet kindness from him, and she held up her child, that he might see it.

"Is he not a lovely babe?" said the young mother, timidly.

"All infants appear to me to be precisely similar," was the ungracious reply, which sent a pang to her gentle heart.

"This is a remarkably fine and healthy child," observed the doctor, who happened to enter the room as my father's heartless remark was uttered.

"Very likely," said my father; "but I

am no judge of infants; and they are all such red, puling little animals, during the first ten months of their existence, that the sight of them affords me no pleasure."

The doctor noticed the blush that rushed to the previously pale cheek of the fond young mother, and looked sternly at the unnatural father who had occasioned it. When both had retired from the apartment of the invalid, he told my father, that as his patient was not only a very delicate and nervous woman, but one who possessed great sensibility, he must request him to shew more regard to her feelings during the present crisis, for everything that produced the least excitement in her mind must be carefully avoided.

"I am not aware," answered my father, angrily, "that I require this advice."

"Young mothers, Sir, are naturally proud of their children, and expect the fathers to sympathize in their feelings. Mrs. Spencer

Meredith was evidently wounded that you did not participate in her delight and admiration of the infant, which is really so fine a one, that any father might well be proud of him."

"As I happen not to delight in babies, I really cannot express raptures that I do not feel," was the answer; and the doctor left the house with a sentiment of deep interest and pity for his patient, and a positive dislike to her unfeeling husband.

"And so you are determined to nurse the child yourself," said my father, two or three days after this, when he saw me placed at the maternal breast.

"Ask me not to resign this delightful task to another," was the meek reply. "Oh, you know not, you cannot even imagine, the bliss of feeling the dear lips of our boy, drawing his sustenance from my bosom!"

"Perhaps not, but I can well imagine

the bore of hearing the little animal screaming half the night, and seeing you lose all your good looks, which will be the inevitable result of such an occupation."

"What are all the good looks in the world in comparison with the health of this treasure?" said my mother.

"I should have imagined that my will and pleasure might have been thought of some importance by you, and that, consequently, you would hardly have risked the loss of those personal attractions that won me."

"I believed that you no longer val——" valued them, she would have said, but becoming conscious that this observation might be received as a reproach, although she did not mean it to be one, she suddenly stopped speaking, and her cheeks became crimson.

"You have yet to learn, Edith, that husbands cannot continue to be the lovers of their wives, as many women are silly enough to imagine; nevertheless, no hus-

band likes to see his wife sacrifice her good looks, which are in society considered to be a proof of his taste, for the gratification of a romantic fancy to nurse her child, a task that can be so much better performed by some healthy and robust peasant, who has neither weak nerves nor undue sensibility to interfere with the fulfilment of her duty."

"But my child thrives so well, and it is such a happiness to me to nurse him, that you will not, I trust, deprive me of it," said my mother, and her eyes filled with tears. At this moment her physician entered the room, and observing her emotion, as well as the lowering brow of my father, instantly concluded that the latter had caused her agitation. He took an opportunity, before he quitted the house, to warn my father of the danger of any anxiety in his patient's present delicate state, and did this in a manner that clearly indicated his suspicions

that there was cause for reproof; a freedom which he at whom it was aimed never forgot nor forgave.

A ceremonious visit to the chamber of the invalid for a few minutes every day marked the extent of the husband's attention to the newly-made mother during the time he remained beneath the same roof with her, but if she still felt hurt at this coldness on his part, she was consoled by the delight afforded her by her occupation of nurse. This was indeed a labour of love to her, and not only did I thrive apace, but her own health became much improved. My father soon left home, having taken a cold and formal farewell of my mother, and for months a few hurried lines, written at long intervals, alone reminded her that she was a wife. But what to her was the neglect she experienced now that she could devote all her time and thoughts to her boy; for whom her love was so engrossing as to leave her no room

for regret. She did not forget her husband, for what woman ever does forget an object once fondly, passionately beloved; neither did she indulge in any angry feelings towards him for the neglect experienced at his hands; but when she looked at her child, and saw him daily growing into health and intelligence, she would sigh at remembering that no fond father's eye remarked his progress, and no affectionate husband shared her delight in beholding it.

The few neighbours within visiting reach of Meredith Hall took a lively interest in the fate of my mother, and evinced it in the usual way chosen by the generality of self-nominated friends; namely, by continually reminding her of that which she would fain forget—the neglect and unkindness of her husband, and by giving her their advice to shew more spirit and resentment.

"I have no patience with Mr. Spencer Meredith," would Lady Ravenshaw, one of

the warmest partisans of the deserted wife, exclaim, "to leave a young and beautiful woman alone and unprotected, for months and months, while he is plunged in all the gaiety and dissipations of London. You really should, my dear Mrs. Spencer Meredith, assert your own rights and dignity, and bring him to reason."

"For my part," said Mrs. Compton Davenport, the wife of the Member for the County, "I have no idea of my amiable friend submitting to such treatment. Here is she living alone and secluded in this solitary place, when she ought, and might too, be living in a fine mansion in one of the most fashionable squares in London, and going to, or giving, fêtes, balls, concerts, and soirées, every evening during the week."

"And she would be so much admired, too!" joined in Lady Emily Mordaunt; "and with a little innocent coquetry, might excite the jealousy of her negligent husband,

punish him by its pangs for all his misdoings, and render him as much in love with her as when they were married."

Lady Emily Mordaunt had been a beauty in her youth, and was more than suspected of having frequently had recourse to the innocent remedy she so warmly recommended to her friend.

"Do," would one and all of these ladies say, "pluck up a little spirit, and shew your tyrant that you will no longer submit to his conduct. Insist on having a house in town, and living as all persons of your fortune and station do."

"Could you only hear what the world says!" added Mrs. Compton Davenport. "I, as wife of the County Member, am obliged to go everywhere, and visit every one, and you cannot imagine how people talk, and blame you, my dear friend, for your want of pride. One person calls you a poor, mean-spirited creature, to submit to such treat-

ment, and another declares that were you not conscious of being in the wrong, you would not bear it as you do."

"But, my dear friends, you mistake my position," would my mother on these occasions say: "Mr. Meredith is no tyrant; on the contrary, he allows me to indulge my preference for the country and privacy, while he, who likes the metropolis and its pleasures, remains there. I certainly could have wished," and she suppressed the deep sigh that rose from her heart, "that our tastes and pursuits were more congenial, that he liked the country as much as I do; but while he permits me to remain undisturbed here, to the full enjoyment of my favourite solitude, have I any right to question or interrupt the mode in which he chooses to spend his time?"

"You would soon think differently were you to pass one season in London!" would one of the before-mentioned female friends exclaim.

"You would be admired, and your society sought in the most distinguished circles!" added another.

"And you might excite your husband's jealousy, and awaken his slumbering affection!" said a third.

"No hour would hang heavily on your hands," resumed one.

"You would not, in fact, have a moment to yourself," rejoined Lady Ravenshaw. "What with paying and receiving visits, shopping, and driving in the Park, dressing and going to fêtes, every moment would be filled."

"Such a mode of existence would be insupportable to me," would my mother answer. "I am never so happy as with my boy, and in pursuing my usual routine of avocations. Between nursing and playing with him, drawing, music, working, and reading, the days pass away so pleasantly and rapidly, that I would rather arrest than

expedite their flight; and as Mr. Spencer Meredith and I have never had an angry word, no unkind feeling can exist between us; though an incompatibility, not of temper but of taste, prevents our being as much together as the generality of husbands and wives are."

But although these judicious and kind female friends were unsuccessful in their endeavours to convince my mother of the wisdom of their counsel, or the prudence of adopting it, their visits never failed to awaken painful feelings, and to leave her depressed and sad for many hours after.

Few things can be more mortifying to a woman of delicacy than to find herself and her domestic concerns made the topic of her neighbourhood; or for a proud woman—and every delicate-minded one is proud—to discover that the neglect and slights of a husband, always so difficult to be borne with equanimity, or even with the show of it,

furnish matter for the gossiping of the county. When these visits—(happily for her to whom they were paid, like angel ones, only in this particular, that they were " few and far between")—were over, my mother would hurry to my nursery, clasp me in her arms, embrace me over and over again; and though her eyes gave token that she had been weeping, and sighs agitated her bosom, my caresses and innocent wiles never failed to restore her to her wonted calmness. Having no hireling nurse to lure my infant affections by artful blandishments and weak indulgence, my whole stock of love was bestowed on my mother, whose absence, even for a few hours, I felt as a calamity, and whose presence always filled me with joy. I learned to know whether she was more than usually pensive, by her countenance and the tones of her voice, long before other children, older than I was, could observe the difference; and, as she

afterwards told me, would redouble my caresses and playful gambols in order to amuse her, desisting not until I had chased away the sadness I had remarked, from her brow. Often would she wander in the pleasure-grounds, carrying me in her arms until fatigued by my weight, when she would place her shawl on the grass as a carpet for me, and laying me on it, would half cover me with flowers, which I would in turn seize and endeavour to throw at her, laughing and crowing all the time. Every development of my physical or mental powers was hailed with a delight which mothers only can sympathize with or understand; and so wholly did my young and beautiful mamma identify her existence with mine, that when I had reached the age of two years, she had become a cheerful, if not a happy woman, in spite of the many efforts of her kind female neighbours to render her

conscious of all the incontrovertible reasons she had for being a wretched one.

It is true, that when assembled after dinner in some drawing-room of one of their respective mansions, awaiting the presence of the gentlemen from the dining-room, to whom the maitre d'hôtel had already, by the command of his mistress, twice announced that coffee was served, these amiable ladies would revert to the melancholy lot of poor Mrs. Spencer Meredith.

"How strange, that she will not accept invitations!" would one observe.

"It must be confessed she is somewhat eccentric!" said another.

"And extremely deficient in spirit!" added a third.

"I have no patience with her for taking things so quietly, after having said and done all in our power to make her feel the extent of her husband's ill usage, and to urge her

into a resentment of it," observed Lady Ravenshaw.

"Her example is a very dangerous one," added Mrs. Compton Davenport. "She is now quoted as a model by all the men. You heard Lord Beltonbrook's extravagant praises of her admirable conduct, as he was pleased to term it?"

"Yes, and Mr. Davenport's remark on the sweet feminine decorum which leads her to avoid general society during the absence of her husband," said Lady Emily Mordaunt.

"Much good it will do her," resumed Lady Ravenshaw. "I know Mr. Spencer Meredith better than she does!"—and here the other ladies exchanged significant looks, for the scandalous chronicles had, some years before, commented very freely on her Ladyship's more than ordinary friendship with this gentleman;—"and I am persuaded that, had she evinced a proper spi-

rit, she would have brought him to his senses."

"She must have very little feeling," rejoined Mrs. Compton Davenport; "for no woman possessed of much could bear her injuries so patiently."

"I have given up all hope of rousing her into resentment," said Lady Emily Mordaunt, "and therefore visit her as seldom as I possibly can, without leaving her off altogether."

CHAPTER III.

And now, when I had completed my sixth year, the solitude of my mother was doomed to be permanently interrupted, for hitherto the visits of my father had been few, and of brief duration. On these occasions, he treated his wife with marked coldness, and scarcely condescended to notice me; yet no word of reproach ever passed my mother's lips, and no sullen or angry look betrayed her sense of his unnatural conduct.

He wrote to say he was coming with a large party for the shooting season, and

sent down a French cook and various other servants to make preparations for their reception. "The wives of two of his friends would accompany them," he added, "and he expected that my mother would exert herself to render their *séjour* at Meredith Park less dull than he had always found it." This phrase brought a blush of wounded pride to her cheek, but it quickly subsided; for she had schooled her mind to bear with dignified calmness the annoyances she could not avert.

And now, with all a mother's love, did she prepare new dresses for me, while careless of commanding any for herself. Vain of my infantile attractions, she wished to aid them by every means within her power; and when trying on my new garments, she would contemplate me with a delight known only to a doting mother, and exclaim, "Yes, he must admire his boy, and admiration may beget love."

"Will you not have some fashionable dresses down from London, madam?" asked Mrs. Lockly, the attached and faithful waiting woman.

"Oh, no! You forget, Lockly, that many of the beautiful dresses in my *trousseau* have not yet been worn, and consequently, I have no occasion to order any others."

"But the fashion, ma'am, is so changed and so very different to what it was, that really, ma'am, I fear you would not appear to advantage in dresses so long made up, and especially, ma'am, before ladies coming down from London. If the visitors were to be only gentlemen it would not so much matter, but ladies are so particular about the latest fashions; and I have heard some of them pass such ill-natured remarks on their acquaintances who did not attend to this point, that really, ma'am, I think (asking your pardon for the liberty I am taking) it would be very advisable to have

a couple of new-fashioned dresses sent down from London, or, at least, to have some of those in your *trousseau* altered to the present mode."

My mother shook her head in token of dissent, and the good Lockly said no more on the subject, although she sighed, not at the utter carelessness about her toilette evinced by a young and beautiful woman, as her mistress really was, but at the neglect which rendered her so indifferent to that which in general occupies so much of the attention of her sex.

"Never was there such an angel!" said Lockly to herself. "I wish, however, she had a little more of the woman in her; for if she had, my master would never have the courage to neglect her as he does; but her gentleness and angelic goodness encourages him to act in the extraordinary manner which sets all our neighbours a gossiping."

At length the day announced for the

coming of my father and his guests arrived. My mother had so well attended to the preparations for their reception that the state-rooms, although so long uninhabited, assumed an air of blended elegance and comfort that would have surprised any one who knew that for the last six years they had not been used.

Three carriages and four drove up to the door at about half-past five o'clock in the evening, and my father, with a fashionable but bold-looking woman leaning on his arm, and followed by another lady and four gentlemen, entered the library, where my mother was waiting to receive them. He coldly touched her cheek, and then presented his companions. "Lady Selina Mellingcourt, Mrs. Spencer Meredith, Mrs. Audley, Lord Algernon Montagu, Lord Henry Buttevant, Mr. Mellingcourt, and Mr. Audley."

The two ladies looked at their hostess with

evident surprise, and the gentlemen glanced at her with as evident admiration. Lady Selina Mellingcourt turned from her scrutiny of my mother, with an expression of dissatisfaction and reproach on her face, towards my father, and then gave a significant regard to Mrs. Audley, who gazed at my mother's dress with ill-suppressed mirth depicted on her arch countenance.

The gentlemen hovered around my mother, who, feeling embarrassed by their somewhat too open and unceremonious marks of admiration, involuntarily adopted a reserve in her manner towards them, which drew forth sundry malicious smiles from Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley.

"Let us see your son," said Lady Selina, addressing herself to Mr. Spencer Meredith.

"By the bye, I quite forgot that young gentleman," replied the unnatural father, ringing the bell, and ordering the servant

who answered the summons, to have me sent to the library.

"He is very shy," observed my mother, timidly; "and perhaps it may be as well if I go to conduct him here."

"I feared that he was a spoiled child," said my father; "but I had no idea that he was so bad as all this;" and he cast an angry glance at my mother, who, blushing deeply, and feeling tears start to her eyes, ventured to say that her boy's shyness proceeded from not being accustomed to see strangers.

"And why has he been kept mewed up in this sort of way?" demanded my father. "It might do no harm to have a girl kept in total seclusion, but for a boy it is perfectly absurd."

Ere my poor mother could offer any reply to this unfeeling remark, if indeed, which I doubt, she was disposed to do so, the door of the library was thrown open, and in I rushed, buoyant with health and

gaiety. No sooner, however, had I observed the strange faces, with the eyes of all fixed on me, than I ran to my mother, and hiding my face in her lap, clung to her in fear.

"Come here, sir!" said my father, in a tone that indicated much less of affection than severity, and which quite completed my previous alarm.

"Go to papa, my love," whispered my mother, her voice tremulous from the fear that my *sauvagerie* would make an unfavourable impression on my father.

"Let me stay with you, let me stay with you, my own dear mamma," whispered I, but, unfortunately, in accents loud enough to be heard by the whole party.

"Then, if you will not come to me, you shall leave the room, like a naughty, spoiled boy as you are," said my father, "and not come into it again until you have been taught how to behave yourself."

"Naughty boy" were words so new to my

ears, that I attached even a more grave signification to them than most children of my age do, and they produced the effect of making me cling still more closely to my mother, while I burst into a paroxysm of tears.

"Send the troublesome little animal away, I entreat you," said my father; "and let me see as little as possible of him while I stay."

My mother rose, and taking me by the hand, led me gently from the library, I weeping bitterly all the time, and my father expressing his disapprobation at her not dismissing, instead of herself conducting me to the nursery. "No wonder the urchin is intractable," said he; "but I must dispatch him to school, where he will not be spoiled, and where I will leave him until he is old enough to go to Eton."

My poor mother heard this speech before the library door closed after her, and it sent

the tears to her eyes in showers, that excited mine afresh. She pressed me to her throbbing breast as we ascended to the nursery, and whispered that I must love papa, and not make him angry.

"But I can't love him!" sobbed I; "for he is cross, and does not love me, nor love you, my own mamma!"—an observation that made my mother weep still more.

Having consigned me to my nurse, she returned to the library, the door of which she had no sooner reached, than peals of laughter struck on her ear, nor when she entered did this uncongenial mirth cease, although her pale cheek and heavy eyelids bore the traces of sorrow.

"You are so droll, Mr. Meredith," lisped Mrs. Audley, "that you make me laugh *bon gré, mal gré moi;* you really have the most comical mode of representing things that in themselves are by no means amusing."

"Do you not find this place very dull?"

asked Lady Selina Mellingcourt, addressing my mother.

"I can fancy a large country house pleasant enough, for a few weeks, when filled with people accustomed to see a great deal of each other in London," interrupted Mrs. Audley; "but to remain here without society must be a dreadful trial of patience, and is one which, I confess, would soon vanquish the small stock of that valuable household commodity which Providence has assigned to me."

"O! you are the most unfit person in the world, Fanny, to try the experiment of a few months in a country house," said Mr. Audley. "I remember how miserable you thought yourself if a single day intervened between the arrival of the coming and departure of the parting guests. By Jove, you hardly allowed the housemaids time to perform their functions, after the departed visitors, before the arrival of the new ones.

Audley Abbey was like an inn on some great thoroughfare, so constant and so rapid was the succession of guests."

"How can you be so *naïve*," observed Lady Selina Mellingcourt, "as thus to expose what Mrs. Audley, like a well-bred wife, so scrupulously wished to conceal?"

"What is that?" asked Mr. Audley.

"Your want of power to amuse her, *tête-à-tête*, for even a single day!" answered Lady Selina, with a most provoking smile.

This sally excited the mirth of all, but particularly of my father, who looked at Lady Selina with even more than ordinary complacency; while my mother felt a sentiment of pity for Mr. Audley, thus rendered an object of ridicule to the whole circle; and the general laugh, too, shared by her who ought to have shielded him from it.

CHAPTER IV.

Although the whole party had not been more than half an hour in the house, their hostess, with that quickness of perception peculiar to women, had already formed a just appreciation of the character of each, and had imbibed an instinctive dislike to the Lady Selina Mellingcourt. Mrs. Audley, a pretty little woman, very coquettish, and with a lively countenance, into which she threw an expression of as much archness as it could assume, said little, but made ample use of a pair of fine hazel eyes, which all the

male portion of her acquaintance considered to be infinitely more eloquent than her tongue. She had delicate hands, and well shaped taper fingers, which were incessantly employed in arranging the long corkscrew ringlets that shaded her cheeks—an occupation which displayed not only their beauty, but also that of the brilliant rings which encircled them. The feet were in perfect harmony with the hands—*mignons*—and *chaussés* by a Parisian *cordonnier;* Mrs. Audley was not only conscious of their symmetry, but anxious that all with whom she came in contact should have a similar conviction. To accomplish this desired end, she ingeniously managed, whether sitting, reclining, or walking, that these said pretty little feet should always be visible. If, however, any person in her circle appeared unmindful of them, Mrs. Audley was rich in resources for forcing attention to these marks of aristocratic birth. She would place them

on her *tabouret*, and move them about, with a gentle motion, as if wholly unconscious that in so doing, not only the pretty little feet, but the round and delicate instep and ankles to which they appertained were fully exposed to view; or she would let them extend far beyond the drapery that ought to have concealed them, when reclined on her sofa. Nay, sometimes she would draw them from their silken slippers, and letting the latter drop on the carpet, would assume an air of embarrassment, while exclaiming, that "it was very strange her *cordonnier* was so stupid that he never could make her shoes small enough to fit her!"

Naïveté and archness were the attractions, in conjunction with her pretty hands and feet, on which Mrs. Audley peculiarly piqued herself, and they were kept in constant practice. To be admired was the sole aim and object of her life, and she achieved this end with a facility not to be wondered

at when the character of her numerous admirers was taken into consideration. She was always ready to administer to the vanity of those who sacrificed to hers. She would admire the small wit, and inane attempts to display it, of the herd of idle coxcombs who hovered around her, provided they were ready to offer homage to her small feet and hands, arch smiles, and *naïve* observations, and declare that she was the most artless and fascinating creature in the world.

Lady Selina Mellingcourt being anxious to secure a female companion, well born and well bred, to make a *vis-à-vis* in her opera box, to defray half its cost, and to be always ready to keep her in countenance in those unceremonious expeditions and parties in which from time to time she engaged, affected a great friendship for Mrs. Audley. She was willing (O! rare proof of female friendship) to admit the delicacy and beauty of the hands and feet of her friend—nay, to

direct attention to them, but consoled herself for this sacrifice of her own vanity by hinting that poor dear Mrs. Audley's arch smiles were not often *àpropos;* and that it was not the wit of her admirers, but the desire of shewing her own teeth, that occasioned them. These remarks only served to convey the impression to these gentlemen that Lady Selina was jealous of the success of her friend; for what man ever doubted the talent of the woman who appears to give him credit for being clever and amusing?

Mr. Audley was a stupid, plain-looking person, who, possessing a good fortune, had been captivated by the flattery of the portionless, but admired daughter of the Dowager Baroness of Beltinglass, and who, in return for the admiration she displayed for him in a thousand *naïve* modes, had, in a luckless hour, offered her his hand, which was quickly and gladly accepted. He discovered in a brief period after his ill-assorted nuptials,

that the flattery previously administered to him, and so agreeable to his ears, was now transferred to the young coxcombs who delighted in flocking around his wife; and he avenged his sense of this slight on her part by a system of querulous contradiction to all her assertions that betrayed his wounded feelings. Yet whenever Mrs. Audley had any point to carry with her husband, she would fool him to the top of his bent by a recurrence to the same flatteries that had originally won him to sue for her hand; and so skilfully would she administer them, that he, while yielding to her wishes, would exclaim, "Why can't you be always as amiable and fascinating as now?" She would answer, "Why are you not as anxious to anticipate my wants and wishes, and as delighted to fulfil them, as when I accorded you this hand?" putting the said little hand to his lips with an arch smile, that for the time being vanquished his ill humour.

The personal extravagance of his wife, and the expensive habits which she insisted that he should maintain, had somewhat embarrassed the finances of Mr. Audley, and he found it convenient to break up his large establishment at Audley Abbey, which its lady, as has been previously stated, would only consent to inhabit when it was filled by a succession of gay visitors, whom she assembled around her whenever her lord, but not master, took up his abode there.

Mrs. Audley's pretension was to pass for a wit in society; and never was a pretension based on a less solid foundation. Had she set up for a beauty, her claims, like those of many a *belle* of her acquaintance with no stronger ones, might have been undisputed; but her attempts at wit had drawn on her such frequent and severe animadversions from those capable of discriminating the true from the false, that she wisely determined to rely henceforth more

on the arch smile and the display of the very white and even teeth that always followed her playful sallies, than on the words she uttered. Yet men were not wanting who gave her credit for the possession of the rare gift to which she pretended. They, it must be confessed, were confined to the very old and to the very young of her acquaintance. Some men, of what are called a certain age,—though, except in cases where the accuracy of Messrs. Debrett or Lodge decide the point, nothing is more uncertain, —being content to be more pleased with nonsense from rosy lips and white teeth than wit or good sense from less tempting ones, declared Mrs. Audley to be a delightful person. Young men, too, who had but lately made their *débût* on the London stage of fashionable life, and who, having no very clearly defined notions of wit, or at least of female wit, mistook animal spirits and arch smiles for that which they pre-

tended to be, applauded the sayings of Mrs. Audley, until a second, or at most a third season in London, rendered them *au fait* of their error; when they unceremoniously deserted her *coterie* for that of some *bel esprit* with pretensions better founded.

Lady Selina Mellingcourt, with no desire for passing for a wit, possessed enough to have enabled her to support the reputation of one unquestioned. Her object was to be a *beauty*, or at least to be so reckoned; and no one who has not observed how frequently women with no one attribute for enacting the *rôle* acquire the reputation, can imagine how easily it may be accomplished. Little more is wanting than for a lady in distinguished society to impress *herself*, and a few individuals of her own *clique*, with a firm belief in her attractions, to insure their unquestioned establishment in public estimation; until some new pretender, possessed most probably of no better claims, usurps

her place, and drives her from being "the cynosure of curious eyes" to be the unobserved of all observers.

The tact and talent of Lady Selina Mellingcourt, soon after her introduction to fashionable life, rendered her aware of the necessity of distinguishing herself from the crowd that eclipsed her, in order to secure that most desirable of all objects to a young and portionless girl—a good marriage. Conscious of her own ability, she for some time entertained the project of setting up for a *bel esprit;* but disgusted by observing the clumsy attempts of some *bas bleus* of her acquaintance to enact the *rôle*, she abandoned the notion; and looking around at the many plain women who passed for beauties, she determined—not to become one, for that she felt would be impossible, but to set up for being considered one.

She immediately adopted a *coëffure* wholly different from the fashionable one of the day,

and moreover, so trying to the looks of even a pretty woman, that few would have had the courage to exhibit themselves in it. This she followed up by a style of dress that had nothing but novelty to recommend it; and having thus rendered herself very conspicuous, as well as different from those with whom she associated, she appeared at a splendid ball given by her brother, the Marquis of Altringham, expressly (as the newspapers announced, a week before it took place) for the purpose of introducing his lordship's young and lovely sister, who was allowed by all who had seen her to be the most beautiful *débutante* of the season.

Lady Selina had no prudent mother nor fastidious *chaperon* to inspect her toilette, and prevent her indulging in any of the freaks of fancy, always considered by those who are the best judges as proofs of bad taste, when glaring enough to attract notice. The Marquis of Altringham had only a few

months before repaired the shattered fortunes of his noble house by an alliance with the wealthy heiress of a city banker, who was content to barter thousands for a coronet, and who was looked on by her husband and his sister as a person to be borne with for the sake of the vast fortune she brought into the family, but whose opinions both of them would have thought it wholly unnecessary, if not derogatory to them, to consult. And yet the Marchioness of Altringham was a person whose opinions might well have been consulted by those with whom she had so recently become connected; for she was not only well educated, but possessed a refined taste and good sense not often to be met with in so youthful a bride.

CHAPTER V.

When, a short time previous to the ball at which Lady Selina Altringham was to make her second appearance in public, both the bride and her sister-in-law had been presented at Court, the Marchioness had attracted great and deserved admiration from all beholders, while the Lady Selina passed unnoticed. This fact, which escaped the notice of the bride, had been remarked by Lady Selina, who, seeing that her sister-in-law had no desire for admiration, determined to set herself up as a beauty; and in accord-

ance with this intention, adopted the style of dress most calculated to draw attention. The surprise which the novelty of her appearance excited she affected to receive as proof of admiration; and she assumed all the airs of a conscious and acknowledged beauty, while people were yet undecided whether they should ridicule or applaud this innovation on fashion. But while exhibiting all the airs of a beauty, Lady Selina carefully avoided the insolence which but too many of these privileged persons have the folly to display. She had smiles and pleasant words for all who approached her, did the honours of her brother's house as if *she*, and not his wife, were its mistress; and yet treated the Marchioness with a sisterly protection and show of fondness that deceived many into the belief that Lady Selina was as amiable as she was clever, and that it was *she* to whom court was to be paid.

The perfect *aplomb* with which Lady

Selina enacted her *rôle*, achieved its object. Nearly the greater portion of those who were at first sight disposed to question, if not deny, her claims, began to think there must be some charm about her, and beholding her own firm conviction of her attractions, yielded, after a little delay, their full credence to the irresistibility of her beauty. In short, they who came to doubt, remained to admire; and in a week, Lady Selina found herself the acknowledged *belle* of the season. The newspapers assisted not a little in extending the fame of her asserted loveliness. "The charming Lady Selina Altringham" was quoted in many a flaming paragraph, as having figured at ball, opera, or concert, the previous evening; her *whereabouts* were noted; her dress cited as a model for imitation, and the *on dits* of various proposals for her hand were copied from journal into journal. Her female contemporaries of similar age, with the tact peculiar to women,

yielded assent to the loud and often repeated praises of her beauty; for they surmised, and with reason, that were they to express their real opinion on the subject, they would only expose themselves to the suspicion of jealousy—a suspicion which women are most anxious to avoid incurring. Matrons were less cautious, and not unfrequently smiled at the usurped reputation of Lady Selina, drawing the attention of her admirers to obvious defects in her face, but which the said admirers declared only served to render her countenance more piquant.

Painters and sculptors, however dissatisfied they may be with the productions of their own pencils or chisels, when some fair ideal has been wrought into all but life by their skilful hands, never indulge such extravagant admiration for it as do those weak and unreflecting men who form the crowd in fashionable life, when they have praised into a spurious fame some mere pre-

tender, without one real claim to beauty. The idol of their own creation is valued solely because *it is* their own creation; and many a lovely creature, with, to unprejudiced eyes, pre-eminent charms, is allowed to pass unnoticed, or, even worse, is cavilled at by those who bow down and worship at the shrine of the golden calf—Fashion. Lady Selina Altringham's picture, as a Muse, a Grace, a Sybil, or in some other fantastic guise, might soon be seen stuck in every printseller's window in the most frequented streets in the metropolis. Artists, hearing the fame of her charms, petitioned for permission to portray them; and the Lady Selina acknowledged, with a well-assumed air of modesty, that she was really tormented by the unceasing applications of those who aspired to descend to posterity by fixing her face on their canvas.

But although the reputation for beauty drew a crowd around the Lady Selina where-

ever she appeared, the season had drawn nearly to its close before a single offer of marriage had been made to her. In vain did she smile and say civil things, in the most insinuating manner, to her admirers; no one among them sought to possess the hand of her whom they all professed to think so irresistible.

CHAPTER VI.

Already did Lady Selina begin to indulge in melancholy anticipations of the *tristesse* of an autumnal and winter *séjour* at Altringham Castle; when, at the last ball of the season,—that eventful ball, on which so many girls feel their hopes to depend, and which, alas! are so often doomed to be disappointed, — Mr. Mellingcourt, a young man of good fortune but of obscure family and of weak intellects, made his appearance. He had but a day or two previously returned from the Continent, where he had

resided for three or four years; and having fallen in with some of his old associates, who spoke of this ball, wished to be invited to it. He dined at his club with some five or six of Lady Selina's most enthusiastic admirers, the day previous to the night on which the ball was to take place; and the conversation turning on her ladyship, after no inconsiderable number of bottles of champagne had been emptied, he became so excited by the extravagant praises lavished on her, that he quite longed to behold this paragon of perfection, as she was represented to be.

"There is nothing like her!" said Lord William Mortimer. "She has refused half the men about town,"—a statement his lordship knew to be wholly incorrect,—"and happy may he consider himself to be who can gain her hand."

Half the men present were on the point of denying the assertion of the number of

refusals given by Lady Selina, each fearing that *he* might be suspected of being among the discarded, but a signal from Lord William Mortimer, seen by all save Mr. Mellingcourt, arrested their tongues, and he again resumed the subject, saying—

"Never was there a young girl so much *à-la-mode* as Lady Selina Altringham; and he will be indeed an enviable man who becomes her husband! Then her connexions are so thoroughly good, all people of high rank, that whoever marries her will at once find himself in the very best, ay, even in the most exclusive society," continued Lord William Mortimer,—"a serious consideration to any man of fortune who happens not to belong to the aristocracy, who now, owing to the vast number of *parvenus* who endeavour to enter their circles, draw the *cordon sanitaire* as strictly as they can, in order to exclude intruders."

This conversation was not lost on Mr.

Mellingcourt. Every word of it made a deep impression on his mind, for he was precisely in the category of *parvenus* anxious to force an entrance with a golden key into a sphere which his birth or habits by no means entitled him to have a place in.

CHAPTER VII.

THE orphan son of a French settler in the Havannahs, he had been confided to the guardianship of a London banker of respectability, with whom his father had in early youth been intimately acquainted; sent to Eton, and thence to Oxford, young Mellingcourt had formed friendships with many young scions of the nobility, and conceived the puerile ambition of continuing in manhood the companionship formed in youth. It was not that he considered his patrician associates more amiable or more agreeable

than the young men of his own class with whom he came in contact, but his frivolous mind was dazzled by the high-sounding titles of the young noblemen who condescended, for the sake of partaking his *recherché* suppers, and not unfrequently borrowing his money, to live on habits of close intimacy with him. He fully calculated on continuing in the same society whenever he took up his abode in London; but to his infinite mortification found, that although many of his *ci-devant* friends were not unwilling to dine with him at a fashionable hotel, where he gave, if not the best, at least the most extravagant dinners that could be ordered, and to take their seats in the boxes of the theatres, for which he paid, no one of them ever offered to introduce him into those circles which he pined to enter, notwithstanding the various hints he gave them on the subject, and although he saw by the newspapers that the near relatives of those

his *soi-disant* friends were the givers of the balls and *fêtes* at which he was so anxious to be present.

Disappointed and disgusted, Mr. Mellingcourt, at the close of his first season in London, during which his only occupation had been to give dinners to men who never invited him in turn, to pay for boxes at the opera and play, nominally called his, but the best seats in which were unceremoniously taken by his self-invited companions, and to lend horses and carriages to those who either wanted money or inclination to defray the expense of keeping those luxuries for themselves, he determined on leaving England, and making a tour on the continent. His companions so loudly and vehemently disapproved of this step — a step which would deprive them of so many comforts, that it is more than probable they might have dissuaded him from the measure, but for the machinations of one of them, who had re-

cently found his longer residence in London a service of danger, owing to the anxiety which certain individuals, comprising the class of coach-makers, jewellers, perfumers, tailors, boot-makers, horse-dealers, &c., evinced to retain him there. This anxiety was, moreover, displayed by employing sundry individuals to secure his person—a proceeding that greatly disgusted him with England. This gentleman, anticipating the probable result of these measures, and not possessing funds to enable him to travel on the continent in the style or comfort which he considered indispensable to a person of his birth and habits, thought that it would be no bad speculation to induce Mellingcourt to go abroad, and to occupy one half of his luxurious travelling carriage, while he placed his valet on the box by the side of the servant of his friend. All this he determined on doing, without incurring a shilling of expense on his own part, and so well did he

lay his plans that Mellingcourt not only invited, but pressed him to do that which he himself had previously decided on doing,—namely, to get franked, thus sparing his own light purse, and dipping heavily into the well-stocked one of his friend.

Tired of the Continent, or, in other words, tired of himself and his companion, Mr. Mellingcourt, after two years' absence, *malgré* all the persuasions of the said *compagnon de voyage*, determined on returning to England, but did not commence his journey until that gentleman had extracted from him a loan of a sufficient sum to enable him to continue his *séjour* on the Continent for another year, which perfectly consoled him for the departure of Mellingcourt.

Lord William Mortimer, like too many other younger branches of the aristocracy, was cursed with a taste for expense, which his scanty provision as a *cadet de famille* was not calculated to support. Few are

those who commiserate this ill-judged and ill-used class of society. Its members, born in feudal dwellings, adorned with all the ensigns of grandeur, and nursed in the very lap of luxury, with eyes accustomed to behold on every side the gauds of hereditary splendour, and with palates habituated only to the choicest viands and exotic delicacies of a princely table, are little fitted for the hardships they must undergo. Behold them while yet in their minorities, ere reason has assumed her empire over their minds, cast on the world either as soldiers, sailors, *attachés d'ambassades*, or embryo parsons, with barely the means of supporting a frugal existence—to defray even the cost of which demands a system of rigid economy seldom appertaining to youth, and least of all to youth nurtured in the hotbed of luxury. Fancy a Lord Augustus, or a Lord William Henry, with a high-sounding, historical, and aristocratic name attached to it, compelled,

after having quitted the magnificent paternal mansion, to lodge in some small and miserable house, in a narrow street, and—O degradation!—perhaps over a mean shop! Instead of being waited on, as hitherto, by half a score of pampered menials, arrayed in laced liveries, and with powdered heads, exhaling the fragrance of a perfumer's shop, look on him, attended by a single servant of uncouth aspect, and smelling of the stable. See him eating off delf, or ironstone crockery, covered with "chimeras dire," or monstrous representations of trees or flowers unknown in nature, instead of feasting off silver, on which is emblazoned the family arms, surmounted by a coronet, or off old *porcelaine de Sèvres*, of greater rarity, and of equal cost. Think, and let your breast heave with pity, of the tough mutton chop, or tougher beefsteak, not only smelling of, but tasting of, coal smoke and burnt fat, served up on the said delf, or ironstone

manufacture, instead of the delicious soups, delicate fish, *recherchés entrées epurée* of all the grosser particles of their component ingredients, and the high-flavoured venison that had cropped its daily food in the parks of their patrician forefathers. But, above all, O gentle reader! think of the muddy port and fiery sherry with which the before-named tough mutton chop or beefsteak is to be washed down, and your heart must be of adamant if you can refuse your pity to the young scions of nobility whose sad lots I have narrated. For me, I cannot dwell on their hapless destinies without the deepest sympathy; and how they can appear in the world with smiling faces, while enduring such privations, has ever been to me a matter of the most extreme surprise. But "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb;" "and shorn indeed to the quick" are those high-born and much-enduring youths.

Lord William Mortimer appertained to

the unhappy class I have described. The travelling companion of Mr. Mellingcourt was his friend, and had, during the two years of his *séjour* on the Continent, corresponded with Lord William, and kept him *au fait* of the peculiarities, desires, and wishes of Mellingcourt, as an amusing topic for his letters.

When he found that he could no longer detain his companion, from whom he felt convinced he had little more to expect, believing in the old adage that applies to all weak and selfish people—"out of sight, out of mind," he determined to hand Mellingcourt over to the tender mercies of Lord William, to whom he wrote by post, apprising him of the good fortune he had thrown in his way. "Never forget," wrote he, "that our golden calf is but a calf after all; being not only a man of no family, but innately vulgar, and that you, the son, although but a younger one, of a marquis,

confer a great honour on him by condescending to teach him how to spend his money like a gentleman, and in assisting him in the operation. Make him bleed freely; never allow him to think for himself; and, above all, let him understand that to you he will owe, should he obtain it, his introduction to our society."

Prepared to receive Mellingcourt, and to turn him to account, Lord William Mortimer welcomed him to London with affected warmth, and offered to be of use to him in forming his establishment and furnishing his stables. Mellingcourt, however, stupid as he naturally was, had profited by past experience, which, if it had not given him wisdom, had at least taught him suspicion, that vice, invariably the attribute of narrow minds. He muttered something about not having yet decided on forming any establishment, or on not having more than two or three horses; adding, that to keep open

house or supply horses to men who never did anything for him in the way of introducing him into fashionable society, was a bore as well as a folly. Lord William took the hint, and answered that Mellingcourt was quite right, but now that he had let him know that he wished to enter the exclusive circles, he would be delighted to present him. Mellingcourt was gratified, and when, in a few hours after, Lord William sent him three cards for balls and routs for the next three nights, extorted from women of high rank, either near relatives or intimate friends of his lordship, to whom he had represented his *soi-disant* friend as a *millionaire*, and an excellent person, Mellingcourt believed that he had at length succeeded in gaining admittance into the best society.

"To get him on," said Lord William Mortimer to himself, "I must positively

marry him to some portionless girl of high family, for he is such a bore and vulgarian that people will never let him establish a footing in our set, and when he finds this out, as he soon must, instead of attributing it to the true cause, he will blame me, and I shall lose all influence over him. Yes, to secure him a position, though at best it will be but a false one, I must get him married. The next question is, who shall the lady be? There is Lady Alice Vernon; she is portionless, but so proud that she would not have him with all his thousands and tens of thousands. No match will suit her but a Lucifer one. Then there is Lady Agnes Digby, without a *sous*. She would jump at him, or rather at the golden bait I could hold out to her; but Lady Agnes is a clever, sharp-witted person, who will let no one manage her husband, or his fortune, but herself. Let me see. Yes, I have it! Lady

Selina Altringham is the very woman! I can manage her; for her vanity and determination to pass herself off for a beauty render her an easy agent in my scheme."

CHAPTER VIII.

To the Lady Selina, Lord William Mortimer immediately went, requested an invitation for Mr. Mellingcourt, the modern Crœsus, as he termed him, hinted that he wished to share his vast fortune with some person of high birth, but that he was so fastidious in his taste, that nothing short of a perfect beauty could satisfy it. He looked at the lady while uttering this speech, and she, nothing loth to appropriate the implied compliment, took the hint, and determined to leave nothing undone in order to share

the boasted wealth of Mr. Mellingcourt. The next night Lord William presented his friend, as he styled him, to Lady Selina, who received him graciously, accorded him her hand for the next dance, and rendered herself so agreeable, that Mellingcourt, although much disappointed in his expectations of her appearance, which had been so much raised by the injudicious and exaggerated eulogiums of his companions the previous night, became fascinated by her gaiety and ease of manner. Lord William could not forbear smiling when, returning from the ball, Mellingcourt declared that Lady Selina was the most agreeable woman of rank he had ever conversed with—an assertion not to be controverted, as she happened to be the *only* one. But the smile was not seen by Mellingcourt, who, engrossed by his self-complacency, observed not the countenance of his companion.

"I did not at the first glance think her

as beautiful as you represented her to be," said Mellingcourt.

"Strange!" observed Lord William Mortimer, for even the most fastidious judges have pronounced her to be faultless. The Prince Hoenholoran, whose fiat is considered as law on the subject of female loveliness, has accorded her the palm over all our beauties; the Duke of Derbyshire has named her *la plus belle des belles;* and the Marquis of Waldershaw, who is scarcely ever satisfied with even our most admired women, has declared Lady Selina to be perfection."

"There is no denying the opinions of such competent judges," said Mellingcourt. "Nevertheless, on first seeing the Marchioness of Altringham and Lady Selina, I took the former to be the lady so praised last night, because she struck me to be so much handsomer than the latter."

"Tell it not in Gath—name it not in Ascalon, my dear fellow; for were such a

thing whispered, you would positively be set down as a man of very bad taste; for any doubt of the loveliness of Lady Selina would be received in the fashionable world as a heresy never to be pardoned. Ah!" and Lord William sighed deeply, "had I a fortune to cope with the train who have sought her hand, how soon would I lay it at her feet! Had you but observed the envy and jealousy you excited this evening, my dear Mellingcourt, you would have been indeed proud."

"Why, I must admit I *was* gratified—ay, exceedingly so, indeed, to have engrossed so much of her attention; for, as I before observed, I never conversed with so agreeable a woman of rank before, and I should not be sorry to have just such a wife as Lady Selina; but that, I suppose, would be totally out of the question, as she has refused so many men of high rank and greater fortune than mine."

"Lady Selina's own rank is so elevated, and her connexions so high, that she might well condescend to marry a commoner, knowing that whoever she weds she will raise to her own station in society," said Lord William, without moving a muscle or changing colour, while uttering what he knew to be a falsehood.

The bait held out to Mellingcourt was greedily seized; for to have the *entrée* into the most fashionable society, and not on sufferance, but on terms of equality, was precisely the object he most desired to attain. Lord William saw that what he had said had produced the desired effect, and followed it up by adding—"I am engaged to go down to Richmond to-morrow with a party; the Altringhams will be there, and, if you wish it, I will manage to get you invited."

"I should like it above all things," replied Mellingcourt, eagerly, "and feel really obliged to you."

"Not at all, my dear fellow—not at all. I mean to get you into the best society; and as I have never yet taken any trouble to introduce any other man of my acquaintance, although often pressed to do so, into my own set, I have no doubt of succeeding. I only hope I shall not be compelled to leave London in two or three days, which I should regret, still more on your account than on my own; for there are a number of fellows belonging to my set who make a point of keeping others out of it. I fear, therefore, were I absent, you might not be able to make your way into the circles you are formed to live in."

"What compels you to leave town?" demanded Mellingcourt.

"The absolute want of a few thousands to quiet my troublesome creditors, who are tormenting me, and whose patience I have nearly exhausted."

Mellingcourt paused a moment, and de-

bated with himself, whether or not he would lend some of his spare thousands to Lord William. He felt no particular friendship for him, for, truth to say, Mellingcourt was incapable of entertaining that sentiment for any one; neither was his a nature that had pleasure in generosity, *malgré* that he had squandered large sums on his *soi-disant* friends. Ostentation and avarice were his ruling foibles; and many were the internal struggles they occasioned; the first urging him to an expenditure that the second severely reproached him for indulging. Incapable of friendship himself, he was incredulous of its existence in others, and conscious, perhaps, of his own want of merit to excite it, (for only those who are unworthy of the blessing deny its beneficent power,) he was content to profit by any kindness shewn to him, without better liking the person who evinced it. Thus would he occasionally expend his beloved money, to

attain a reputation for generosity which he was sensible of not deserving; or to accomplish some point in which his selfishness was interested. The result may easily be divined. Those who conferred kindness on him, mortified by having their motives suspected, and their acts depreciated, conceived a dislike to him, which avenged their humiliated feelings; and those on whom he had bestowed large gifts, forgot them, and became ungrateful, as they discovered that to ostentation and not to good will they owed the favours they had received. If the purse-strings of Mellingcourt sometimes opened, his heart never did, and as he never forgot a benefit conferred, and never remembered one received, he made no friends.

"How much would extricate you for the present?" demanded Mellingcourt, after serious consideration, and mature deliberation, whether it would be worth while to pay a few thousands in order to retain Lord

William on the spot, for the purpose of getting him into society; or whether it would not be as well to let him depart, and trust to some other chance for entering the charmed circle he was so desirous to penetrate, and so save his thousands. "It will be whispered in all societies, bruited in all the clubs, that I have saved a scion of nobility from ruin!" whispered Ostentation. "But it will cost you some thousands to do this!" murmured Avarice. "Without him you will never get where you want to be," said Selfishness. "And by assisting him, you will be counted noble, generous, and good!" added Ostentation. The two latter pleaders silenced Avarice. Nevertheless, when Lord William answered the question of "How much would extricate you?" by saying "Ten thousand pounds!" Mellingcourt positively started.

"Ten thousand pounds!" repeated he. "That is indeed a large sum." And again

Avarice whispered—"Don't give it to him;" while Ostentation said, "Were you to give him only a small sum it would excite no sensation in the great world; and would convey no impression of the magnitude of your fortune. Give it; you will be lauded to the skies!"

"If you are quite sure that ten thousand pounds will really extricate you, and leave you at liberty to remain in town as long as I do, I will lend them to you," said Mellingcourt, with that considerable extension of visage termed a long face, and a severity of tone that would have led a person to believe that he was committing an act of retributive justice, instead of conferring a favour.

"Thank you, my dear fellow!" said Lord William, extending his hand to clasp that of Mellingcourt, who held out the tips of his fingers to receive the intended cordial

pressure, and thus chilled the warmth kindled in the breast of one, who, albeit unused to kindly emotions, for the nonce experienced something like gratitude towards the man who evinced an intention to serve him.

It was long since Lord William Mortimer slept so soundly as on the night on which Mellingcourt promised to pay down ten thousand pounds for him; for, of late, his slumbers had been much disturbed by the menaces of his creditors—menaces which he felt they were fully determined on putting into execution, unless some unexpected piece of good fortune enabled him to pay them a portion of their claims. His fears were now at rest, for at least some months to come; and he indulged in visions of city heiresses to be found, or rich dupes to be met with, to extricate him on that future day so vaguely defined in the perspective of

the thoughtless spendthrift, yet so inevitably ruinous in its consequences, however postponed.

Mellingcourt's pillow was an uneasy one that night. Seldom has the consciousness of a bad action occasioned more pain to the perpetrator, than did the recollection of this unusual liberality inflict on this *riche avare*. He groaned while he cursed his own weakness and folly for having sacrificed so large a sum to extricate a man for whom he cared nothing; forgetting that it was only to forward his own scheme of entering the magic circle from which he had hitherto been excluded, that led him to make a pecuniary sacrifice of such vast magnitude. In vain did he reflect that he had still thousands and tens of thousands at his disposal; and that, large as was the sum he had pledged himself to give Lord William Mortimer, it could not occasion him the slightest inconvenience. He could not

recover his temper as the thought occurred, that the facility with which he had accorded so heavy a loan, would inevitably lead to false expectations, if it did not entail similar demands from the same quarter. "Pshaw!" muttered he, as the word *loan* passed through his thoughts, "he will never have either the means or the inclination to repay me. No, my ten thousand pounds are gone for ever! Fool that I was, to sacrifice them to attain so puerile an object!"

How strange and incomprehensible is man! Ever exaggerating the value of any object he wishes to achieve, and to depreciate it as soon as acquired. Mellingcourt, as he tossed in his sleepless bed, wondered how he ever could have dreamed of paying so immense a sum as ten thousand pounds of the lawful coin of Great Britain, for an introduction into scenes like the one he had figured in that night, though the previous day he would willingly have devoted double

that sum to accomplish the point Lord William Mortimer had obtained.

"I had formed an erroneous notion of these so much vaunted aristocratic circles," thought he to himself. "What are they, after all? The rooms in which they congregate, it is true, are larger and loftier than those into which I had previously been admitted; the furniture less gaudy, yet the *tout ensemble* is more brilliant,—for old family diamonds help wonderfully to light up a room, nay more, they enhance the charms of the wearers by the associations of feudal power and grandeur they call up. But the cold looks, and colder manners of these aristocrats, whose countenances appear as if they could never beam with joy, or melt in sorrow; and the *hauteur* with which they tolerate (instead of cordially receiving) the advances of a stranger, whatever his fortune may be, is very unlike the good-humoured reception given by the less elevated persons

with whom I have hitherto associated. They seem to me to take no pleasure in the amusements they seek; and even when dancing, the gravity of their countenances is more suitable to the mourners at a funeral than to the votaries of Terpsichore. The only exception was Lady Selina Altringham. She is a very superior person, though by no means a beauty, notwithstanding people assert her to be so. Well, well,—the reputation is perhaps as advantageous as the possession of good looks; and as Lady Selina *is* the fashion, 'the observed of all observers,' as Lord William Mortimer says, (hang that fellow, I wish I could get him out of my head!) *I* should not be sorry—nor would she, I think, regret it—were she my wife. I should then have no occasion to pay for admission into the best society; for, as her husband, I should naturally take my place in it. I wish I had not promised Mortimer the ten thousand pounds. Why,

that very sum would have gone a great way in paying for her diamonds, if I should marry her! I might have got off by paying less than half that sum to Mortimer for introducing me to her, but I was such a fool as not to take time for reflection. Is there no way of getting off paying the whole sum? I must try what can be done."

With this resolution, Mellingcourt resigned himself to sleep at a late hour in the morning, and dreamed that he was ruined by Lord William Mortimer, who, in the shape of a conjuror, by a dexterous *tour* of sleight of hand, possessed himself of all his fortune. He awoke in terror, rubbed his eyes, and recalling to mind the promised loan of the previous night, swore that never again would he commit the folly of lending money.

CHAPTER IX.

Before Mellingcourt had left his dressing-room the next day, Lord William Mortimer was with him. There was a coldness and constraint in the manner in which he was received that might have wounded a more delicate mind than that of Lord William; for it plainly denoted that Mellingcourt felt anything but satisfaction at seeing him, or in fulfilling the engagement into which he had entered. A few years spent in London, and, above all, in fashionable society, is so well calculated to destroy the pride and

sensitiveness of men, that the generality of those who have entered its giddy vortex retain no trace of these qualities; although were any one openly to impugn their possession of them, a duel would inevitably be the result. Lord William Mortimer felt the ungraciousness of Mellingcourt's reception of him; but the extreme embarrassment of his finances, and the urgent demands and menaces of his creditors, compelled him not only to submit to this offensive behaviour on the part of the rich *parvenu*, but also to the humiliation of reminding him of that which he seemed now to have totally forgotten—namely, the promised loan of the ten thousand pounds.

"I find," said Mellingcourt, looking exceedingly out of humour, "on consulting my banker's book, that it will not be convenient for me to advance you so large a sum at present; but if three thousand pounds will do, I will give you a cheque."

"It would not answer the purpose for which I consented to be your debtor," replied Lord William, the last blush of wounded pride rising to his cheek. "I wish you had not offered me the ten thousand," resumed he, "for on the faith of it I have been this morning making terms with my harpies, who will now be so enraged at being disappointed, that I dare not remain in London a day longer. I am sorry for this, on your account as well as on my own; for I have got you an invitation to the water-party to-day, where I was to have presented you."

"But now that I know Lady Selina Altringham, she can perform that ceremony for me," said Mellingcourt, coolly.

"Impossible!" replied Lord William. "You forget that for a young and unmarried lady to present any man, save a brother, to a whole circle of strangers, and, permit me to add, more especially a man whose

very name is not known in that circle, would be a solecism in etiquette and *l'usage du monde*, which Lady Selina Altringham, with her knowledge *du bienséance*, would be the very last person in the world to commit. I will not trespass on your time any longer."

Lord William, with an air of hauteur, that reminded Mellingcourt more forcibly than he wished of the difference of their birth, took up his hat, and moved towards the door; but within the last few minutes, all Mellingcourt's desire to enter high life had revived with additional force, owing to the chance of being defeated in his wishes.

"Don't go yet," said he; "perhaps we may devise some means of getting you out of this scrape. I think I could manage to give you six thousand pounds, if that would extricate you."

"I have already told you that no less a sum than ten thousand would do," answered

Lord William, coldly; "for, as I previously informed you, my faith in your *voluntary offer* has led me to propose terms, which having been accepted, I cannot recede from; consequently I have nothing left but to quit London at once."

"But if I make so large an advance," said Mellingcourt, "can you not find some friend or relation to lend the other four? Your brother, for instance, he has a large fortune."

"Yes; and like all noblemen with large fortunes, has many claims on him," answered Lord William, bitterly. "Various extensive hereditary seats to be kept up; a style of living suitable to high rank to be supported; innumerable dependents to be maintained; and charities, public and private, to be subscribed to; from all of which costly liabilities and necessities a wealthy commoner, with an unknown name and funded property, is utterly exempt.

Mellingcourt's cheek grew red at this observation, and he hesitated what to do, when Lord William again walking towards the door with an air of increased *hauteur*, he exclaimed, "Stop a moment! I will go to my bankers, and arrange with them to give you the ten thousand pounds, for which I will now write a cheque; but don't present it until I shall have been there."

The cheque was written, and Lord William Mortimer left the room with it, his gratitude for the loan considerably, if not wholly, decreased by the mode in which it had been granted, for he was by no means imposed on by the pretended plea of temporary poverty urged by Mellingcourt, or the affected necessity of that gentleman's seeing his bankers before the cheque was presented. So convinced was he of the fallacy of this assertion on the part of his *soi-disant* friend, that he lost not a moment in going straight to Mellingcourt's banker, where, as

he fully anticipated, the sum was counted out to him the moment he presented the cheque, as would have been triple its amount, had the drawer given a cheque for it. Lord William smiled contemptuously at the *ruse* of Mellingcourt as he consigned the bank-notes to his pocket, forgetful that he had never previously possessed one quarter of the sum that he now owed to the man, to whose weakness, and not generosity, he justly attributed the action; and that if that man had evinced a want of delicacy and good feeling in the manner of giving it, *he* had exhibited no less in stooping to receive it, after he had so clearly seen the unwillingness with which it was bestowed. But thus it often is: people are prone to accuse others of a want of delicacy when they themselves are violating it to an equal degree.

To the water-party Lord William and Mellingcourt went. He presented the

latter to all to whom he thought the acquaintance would be acceptable, consisting of titled persons of both sexes, not overburthened with wealth or fastidiousness of taste, and whom the good dinners and boxes at the theatres, which he intended to make Mellingcourt provide, would reconcile to the measure. He whispered to each of these individuals, previous to the introduction, "Pray let me present my friend Mellingcourt to you; he is as rich as Crœsus; is going to set up the most splendid establishment; will give dinners, balls, and concerts, all through the season, and will have double boxes at every theatre. He does not care much about these things himself, but likes to offer them to his acquaintance. A marrying man, too!"

These hints procured Mellingcourt a very polite reception from those who, had they not been given, would have, in all probability, declined the introduction, or received it so

coldly as to have checked further advances. Such is the advantage of wealth.

Lady Selina Altringham quickly observing the gracious smiles, civil manner, and polite speeches directed towards Mellingcourt, became somewhat alarmed lest some one of the unmarried ladies present should secure the golden prize she wished to call her own. She glanced anxiously at the group, where he was awkwardly bowing from one person to another, when Lord William Mortimer, who shrewdly guessed what was passing in her mind, advanced to her side, and speaking in a low tone, remarked, "How very popular with the women Mellingcourt is becoming! He will soon be snatched up," continued he, "for he is too great a prize not to be sought after." Then observing her look of increased alarm, he added, "Mellingcourt, however, has such perfect confidence in my judgment that he will not make any selection without consulting me.

She may, indeed, consider herself fortunate who weds him, for his enormous fortune and taste for splendour will place her in a very enviable position. I am partial, very partial, to Mellingcourt, and it would give me pain to behold him forgetting, in the charm of a new tie, the friendship that has so long subsisted between us. Yet such is in general the invariable consequence of marriage, for no sooner does a man enter that holy state than his wife makes him abandon his old friends and associates, and he becomes as wholly lost to them as if he had departed this life instead of having married."

"But this surely could not occur where the wife was a sensible person," replied Lady Selina Altringham. "Such a woman would be glad to profit by the knowledge an intimate friend must have acquired of the disposition and habits of her husband, in order to accommodate herself to those peculiarities from which no man is exempt."

This reply convinced both the interlocutors that they perfectly understood each other, and encouraged them to be more explicit.

"Then I am to understand," resumed Lord William, "that were you, *par exemple*, Lady Selina, to become the wife of my friend, you would be content to share instead of attempting to destroy my empire over him?"

"I never thought of myself," said the lady; "but if so unlikely an event were to take place, I should be the last person in the world to even dream of shaking your influence; *au contraire*, I should decidedly do all in my power to strengthen it, from the conviction that a man like Mr. Mellingcourt, who has not lived in the great world—that is, *our* world—would stand greatly in need of a male friend as well versed in all the usages and habits of it as Lord William Mortimer is."

"Is it then quite understood between us

that in case you wed Mellingcourt, I am to remain, as now, his confidential friend and adviser?" asked Lord William.

"Perfectly!" answered the lady; "although the case is so hypothetical a one, that it makes me smile for us to enter into such grave preliminaries on the subject."

Lord William smiled too, and then said, "Your marrying my friend, Lady Selina, will now depend solely on yourself; for such is my power over him, that ere many days can elapse he will lay his hand and fortune at your feet."

The prediction of Lord William was fulfilled; and Lady Selina, nothing loth, was led to the altar by Mellingcourt, with whose weakness of intellect and selfishness, short as had been their courtship, she had become well acquainted. Most women with this knowledge would have shrank back affrighted from a union with so unworthy a man; but Lady Selina, conscious of her own firmness

of purpose, and perseverance in accomplishing all she willed, was undaunted at the prospect before her; and, determined to live for the world alone, she felt regardless of the inferiority of the partner for life she had selected. Was he not rich, and fond of splendour? What more could she desire? Even the difference of their birth and station she considered rather as an advantage than otherwise, for she thought it would enable her to assert her superiority over him whenever his selfishness led him to rebel. No stronger example could be given of the evil effect of the faulty system of education at present but too often practised, than in thus seeing a young and highly born woman accepting with willingness the hand of a man for whom she entertained not a single sentiment of affection or esteem. Like other girls, Lady Selina had been taught to consider that all the pains bestowed in giving her the various showy

accomplishments in which she excelled, had but one aim and end—namely, the rendering her attractive, and so leading to the securing for her a splendid marriage. This lesson had been more strongly impressed on her mind, by her having witnessed, on more than one occasion, the unhappy condition reserved for women of high birth, with only a miserable pittance of some five thousand pounds, and who, having failed in their matrimonial hopes, had been left dependents on elder brothers, not always disposed to extend to them the kindness they required; or to reside with married sisters, whose husbands not unfrequently betrayed their distaste to what they were prone to consider more as an addition than an acquisition in their establishments.

CHAPTER X.

Ere this ill-assorted union took place, Mellingcourt had let the unamiable points of his character—and they were many—be so plainly seen, that any woman less determined on marrying him than was Lady Selina, must have inevitably broken off the engagement. The Marquis of Altringham, thoroughly disgusted with his intended brother-in-law, although well disposed to see his sister wedded to a wealthy man, advised her to decline the marriage, urging, as a motive for this advice, the undisguised and

unblushing selfishness and meanness exhibited by the lover—if lover he might be called. In relation to the settlement, these offensive qualities were pre-eminently displayed; for while he evinced no inclination to give up the portion of Lady Selina, consisting only of five thousand, he wanted to assign her so limited a jointure and pin-money, that had the family lawyer of the Marquis of Altringham not interfered, and brusquely, too, the reasonable allowance ultimately extorted from him would never have received his assent. The truth was, Mellingcourt felt not one particle of admiration or affection for his future bride. He saw in her only a person of high birth, noble connexions, and great fashion; by an alliance with whom he could enter that society in which he longed to find himself established, without the necessity of having recourse to those expedients to which he had hitherto been compelled to resort. Calculating on

never being paid the loan extended so unwillingly to Lord William Mortimer, he determined on subtracting that sum from the dowry of his bride; and no angry reasoning on the part of the family lawyer, nor advice from his own, could induce him to name a larger settlement than five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and three hundred a-year pin-money. The jewels presented to her, and which he took care should be bought second hand, (pretending that they had appertained to his deceased mother,) he strictly entailed on his son and heir; and in case of his dying without male issue, they were to revert to whomever he might bequeath them, leaving Lady Selina but a life-interest in them, and even this to cease in case she married a second time, or that she was ever to separate from him.

In despite of all these mean and unusual proceedings, so well calculated to disgust any woman of delicacy, Lady Selina became

the wife of Mellingcourt; and a less attached bride and bridegroom never left St. George's church than the "happy pair," as the newspapers termed them, "who, in a travelling carriage and four, set off to spend the honeymoon at Altringham Castle, the seat of the noble and beautiful bride's brother." Prepared to gain an ascendancy over her narrow-minded and selfish husband, Lady Selina sedulously set about the task she had assigned to herself. She studied to conciliate, if not to charm him; but ere they reached Altringham Castle, she discovered that he was so impracticable that the task would be a hopeless one. He had neither the attentions of a tender bridegroom nor the gallantry of a polite one. He allowed her to fatigue herself by keeping up a continual effort to amuse him by her conversational powers, and they were considerable, without ever acknowledging the success of her attempts by a smile, or a civil speech.

It was only when they reached Altringham Castle, that, awed by the feudal grandeur of this fine baronial residence, he vouchsafed to betray any symptom of pleasure. The grand entrance hall, hung with burnished armour, and the magnificent gallery, from the walls of which frowned many a noble knight, and glanced many a stately dame, surprised as well as pleased him. This was the first princely abode he had ever entered as a bidden guest; for hitherto, at the few show-houses he had seen,—and none of them were to be compared to the splendid one he was now in,—he experienced a sensation akin to awe, as, escorted by a garrulous old housekeeper, proud of the ancestry and grandeur of her aristocratic employers, she strutted along, proclaiming the titles and degrees of those whose portraits covered the walls. But at present—and the recollection pleased him—he came to a stately castle, one of the strong-holds of ancient

nobility, not as a curious intruder, protected by the paid civility of a menial cicerone, but as a member of that high family, a scion of whom leaned on his arm, and moved along through the vast suite of rooms filled with the finest works of art, and most costly furniture, with an indifference that proved she was too much accustomed to such scenes to derive either surprise or gratification from them. He glanced at the walls, and saw innumerable fine portraits, with the name of Selina, in gilt letters, inscribed on the massive frames, followed by various titles, from that of duchess, marchioness, countess, and viscountess, down to baroness, with the most ancient names. *She*, too, whose fine form and elevated head resembled these stately ancestral dames, from whose proud lineage she had sprung, *she* was now his bride—the link that united him, a man of mean origin, to that long race of nobility whose progenitors still frowned or smiled

from the walls of the lofty castle, where they had once moved in feudal grandeur and princely state. He was awed into a new feeling of respect for Lady Selina, and was proud that his name was now allied to that of one of the most illustrious families of the English aristocracy.

The Marquis of Altringham had sent a number of his servants down to the castle, where during his absence only a few had been left, in order to do honour to the bride; and as these in their gorgeous liveries lined the halls, and a portly dame, attired in the richest brown satin, and wearing a profusion of fine lace, curtsied lowly to the "happy couple," Mellingcourt drew himself up to the utmost height his stature would admit, half fancying himself a noble too, and ready to exclaim—"I now have a right to take my place here among all this goodly show!" He had seen these same gorgeous liveries that at present dazzled him, in the

Marquis's mansion in London, but there they produced much less effect than here, where everything testified the grandeur and antiquity of the family with which he had allied himself. He wondered how he had courage enough to treat the scions of such a lofty race so unceremoniously as he had ventured to do during the last few days, while the marriage-settlements were preparing; and thought that had the brief courtship that led to his nuptials taken place at Altringham Castle instead of in a modern mansion in Grosvenor Square, he would have been more respectful, as well as more generous. The Marquis of Altringham in London, seemed little more than any other of the numerous lords to be seen every day there, or even than the rich commoners, many of them *parvenus*, who vied with them in the splendour of their establishments; but in the feudal castle of a long race of noble ancestors, there was no possi-

bility of forgetting the high station of its owner, and Mellingcourt thought that were *he* in the brilliant position of his brother-in-law, he would always reside at Altringham Castle, instead of confounding himself with the crowd of less distinguished aristocracy in the capital.

Lady Selina was not slow to observe what was passing in the mind of her husband, nor displeased at marking the involuntary effect produced in his manner towards her; for she was glad to discover that there was even one point by which he could be rendered more civilized—a fact of which, during her journey from London, she had learned to doubt. Yet though the wife, anxious only to govern, was pleased at the prospect afforded of acquiring an influence over her ill-bred husband, the woman and the bride owned, with bitterness to herself, that in both characters, *she* had failed to awaken any one of the sentiments usually

excited in the breast of a man under such circumstances; and, her *amour propre* deeply humiliated, she began to entertain a stronger feeling than the indifference she had hitherto experienced towards Mellingcourt—a feeling of positive dislike. She reflected not that the undignified facility with which she had, on a brief acquaintance, accorded her hand to a man so much her inferior, was ill calculated to render him either a warm, or a respectful bridegroom. She forgot everything but that he had profoundly wounded her womanly vanity, by letting her observe that the little deference shewn to her originated alone in the view of the pageants that reminded him of her high birth, and not in any affection to herself.

The next day, Lady Selina went over the princely castle of her brother with Mellingcourt; and now aware of his *parvenu*-like respect for high rank and ancient lineage, omitted not to increase it, by dwelling on

the heroic deeds of her ancestors, as she pointed out their portraits on the walls of the picture-gallery and gilded *salons*. She assumed on this occasion an air of *hauteur* by no means natural to her, for, like all persons of high family, she was not prone to attach any inordinate value to the adventitious gifts of birth and station to which from infancy she had been accustomed. This assumption of *fierté*, which would have disgusted any man of good sense and delicacy, had a very contrary effect on Mellingcourt; and Lady Selina was more than once tempted to smile at the change in his manner, as, when pointing out certain beautiful lustres of rock crystal, splendid vases of porcelain, costly mirrors in silver frames, and other rare objects of *vertu*, she intimated that they had been the gifts of sovereigns, in commemoration of their visits to her ancestors.

Unhappily, use blunted Mellingcourt's

feelings of respect towards the feudal grandeur that now surrounded him, for ere a week had elapsed, he had ceased to wonder at and admire all that which had on his first arrival astonished and awed him. Lady Selina was, after all, his wife—no longer Lady Selina Altringham, but Lady Selina Mellingcourt—no bad sounding name, thought he, and he would no longer treat her as if she were superior in any way to himself. "What if she *has* high birth and rank on her side," soliloquized Mellingcourt, "have I not wealth on mine? and what is the value of rank and high birth without fortune to sustain them? To keep up this princely place, her brother, the most noble Marquis of Altringham married the heiress of a city banker, of obscure origin, and the Lady Selina, who has lately shewn herself so proud of her ancestry, has wedded with me—yes, with me, of whose birth she knows nothing, merely because I am rich; for I have never deceived myself

into a belief that personal liking had anything to do in the affair on her side any more than on mine. I have seen enough of England to know that fortune can enable those who possess it to get on very well without high birth or title; while the possessors of these two last advantages, if poor, are infinitely worse off than if they were untitled. Yes, wealth is much better than rank; and as I have it, I will carefully guard this precious talisman of power, and frustrate the projects which I can clearly see Lady Selina has formed, of freely disbursing the fortune for which she bartered her hand."

Mellingcourt was not slow in disclosing to his wife the opinions he entertained, nor the firm decision he had made of acting up to them. In vain did she endeavour to lead him to adopt more generous feelings, and a more liberal course. He was impracticable; and even before a month had

elapsed, and that month the honeymoon, when husbands have not yet thrown off the smiles of lovers to assume the frowns of masters, she learned to know that hers promised to be no happy lot in life, and that she had drawn no prize in the lottery of wedlock. Vainly did she essay to enact *la grande dame*, the lineal descendant of the courtly lords and ladies, whose faces glowed on the walls around her; some rude pleasantry, or common-place remark on the poverty of nobility, which he vulgarly instanced by reminding her of the *mésalliance* formed by her brother, and her own marriage with himself, silenced her tirades, and disgusted her from further attempts to civilize the low-minded husband, who was impenetrable alike to her flatteries or reproaches. He told her he would *not* purchase a house in London, or a seat in the country. He had no idea, he said, of incurring any such unnecessary expenses.

He would reside in a fashionable hotel, in London, during the season, a measure which would exempt him from the necessity of keeping a number of servants, or of giving entertainments; and during the autumn and winter, he would either go to the Continent, or pass the time in paying visits to the seats of those relations of hers, who, he added, would of course invite them. Lady Selina was not a woman to sit down and mourn over the death of the hopes that had induced her to wed Mr. Mellingcourt. The same want of sensibility and refined feelings that led to her marriage with him enabled her to bear up against the severe disappointment that step had entailed on her, and she determined that while submitting to what was now inevitable, she would do all in her power to enjoy whatever pleasure might still be within her reach.

CHAPTER XI.

Never passed honeymoon so gloomily and slowly as that of this ill-assorted couple. Mellingcourt, as if to avenge the awe experienced during the first three days of his *séjour* at Altringham Castle, treated Lady Selina with an insolent familiarity worthy of the example given by the profligate Lauzun to "*la grande demoiselle*," whose *fierté* he gloried in humiliating; but the lady, feeling none of the affection for her husband entertained by the French princess for him to whom she had so longed to be

united, was by no means disposed to support it, although policy prompted her to conceal the deep dislike and contempt it engendered.

Glad was she to leave Altringham Castle, and the insupportable, unbroken *tête-à-tête* with her vulgar husband; while he consoled himself with the reflection that a month's expenditure at an hotel had been saved by the princely hospitality exercised by his wife's brother. Yet this liberality on the part of the Marquis had so little effect on his mind, that when Lady Selina reminded him of the necessity of bestowing a parting gift of money on the domestics of the castle, he positively refused to do so, on the plea that he made it a point never to pay the servants of others; and she found herself compelled to leave with them the residue of her maiden purse, which had not yet been replenished by her husband, to demand money from whom her pride revolted.

Among the first visitors on their arrival

in town, was Lord William Mortimer. Mellingcourt's reception of him was as ungracious as he could venture to make it, without giving Lord William a right to resent it and demand an explanation. Lady Selina, uninfluenced by the example of her husband, behaved with the cordiality due to an old acquaintance; for ill as her marriage promised to turn out, she felt that it was herself, and not Lord William, she had to blame for having contracted it. When he was leaving the room, evidently hurt by Mellingcourt's treatment of him, the latter accompanied him to the antechamber, and Lady Selina overheard the sound of their voices raised as if in angry altercation. When Mellingcourt re-entered the apartment, his face was flushed, and he broke out into a contemptuous attack on the aristocracy.

"A pretty set," said he; "truly, they deserve to be respected. There goes a lord-

ling, to whom I lent ten thousand pounds, which I have never since ceased regretting, and, forsooth, he acts the grand, and is surprised that I did not rush into his arms, as friends do on the stage, but nowhere else."

"Persons of a certain station, when they have accepted obligations, and above all, pecuniary ones, are peculiarly alive to any want of kindness of manner in those who have conferred them," said Lady Selina; "and I confess I did observe, although ignorant of your loan to Lord William Mortimer, that your reception of him was not friendly."

"Nor did I intend it to be so. I well knew that if I appeared cordial, he would have in all probability demanded an additional loan from me, and so I not only behaved coldly, but followed him out, and asked him when I could count on his repaying me the money, or at least a portion of it, as I have great occasion for it at present.

He looked as much astonished as if I had *given* instead of lent him the sum; said he did not expect to be called on so soon, and could not state when he could repay me. This does not surprise me, for it is no more than I expected; but I have by my politic conduct precluded him from ever again soliciting a loan of me, and this is something gained."

Shocked and disgusted, Lady Selina forbore making any reply, and Mellingcourt, concluding that his reasoning was unanswerable, indulged in more than his ordinary self-complacency. The waiter of the hotel presented the *menu*, the length of which evidently alarmed the parsimony of him to whom it was, with a low bow, handed; for he hastily returned it, saying, "It is very probable that we shall not dine at home, and should we do so, some mutton cutlets and a roast chicken will suffice, but I will let you know in time."

When the grave and solemn man had withdrawn, Lady Selina ventured to say, that as her brother was absent from town, it was not probable that they should receive any invitation for the day of so short a notice.

"Well, let the worst come to the worst," answered Mellingcourt, "for so slight a dinner as we shall require, a half hour's notice to prepare it will be sufficient; for my opinion is, that of all the modes of throwing away money, the most absurd is having expensive dinners at hotels, or indeed at one's own house, when there is no company."

"Yet you did not object to the *recherché* and expensive dinners at Altringham Castle, where we were only *tête-à-tête*," observed Lady Selina, disgusted at his parsimony.

"They cost me nothing," replied Mellingcourt; "and I like good dinners, when I am not to pay for them."

Two days subsequent to this conversation, Mellingcourt, while looking over a newspaper, after breakfast, exclaimed, "This is indeed lucky! Lord William Mortimer's brother has died without a son, and he is now Marquis of Bayswater. I shall therefore have my money back again; for he never can be so bad as not to pay me, although these young men of the aristocracy are capable of anything. I now begin to wish that I had not asked him to pay me, but who could have expected that his brother would have died so soon?"

It would be tedious to recount the scenes that followed during the first two or three years of Mellingcourt's marriage. Neither of the parties found in it the advantages on which they had calculated; and mutually disappointed in their expectations, they avenged themselves by exhibiting a dislike towards each other, which neither good breeding nor good sense operated to control, even

in society. The consequence of this impolitic conduct was, that no one thought of inviting them together to country houses, lest their presence and continual disagreements should mar the harmony of such reunions; and Mellingcourt would neither give consent nor furnish the means to allow of Lady Selina's accepting invitations not extended to him. His meanness and love of money increased every day. He withheld the scanty pin-money settled, on her marriage, on Lady Selina, or only paid her such small portions of it that she was compelled to contract debts in order to make an appearance suitable to her station. When any of the bills thus contracted were presented to him, his anger knew no bounds, and he poured such a torrent of abuse on her head, that, albeit, not being naturally timid, she felt positively afraid to encounter him on such occasions. Time, instead of softening the asperities of his temper, only served to

increase them; and in place of reconciling her to the lot now inevitable, and so unwisely chosen, rendered her hatred of her husband still more virulent. The Marquis of Bayswater repaid the ten thousand pounds lent to him, but, disgusted with the conduct of the lender, omitted no opportunity of proclaiming his meanness and vulgarity; and as the Marquis was rich, and possessed considerable influence in fashionable society, his opinion of Mellingcourt, openly avowed, induced many persons to avoid him, while the relatives of Lady Selina were loud in their censures of his behaviour to her, and pertinacious in refusing to receive him in their society. Lady Selina was now considered a victim to her domestic tyrant, and though not a beauty, the reputation acquired as one previous to her marriage was still remembered, and men were not found wanting who were disposed to console her for the unhappiness of her wedded life.

Such consolation, if the Scandalous Chronicle may be believed, she was not loth to accept; and from the period of her doing so, fewer quarrels arose between her husband and her on the subject of her personal expenses, although his liberality had by no means increased. He marvelled not at seeing her wear dresses of the richest materials, and valuable trinkets, for which he was never asked to pay, contenting himself with frequently declaring, that if *his* wife, like many of those of his acquaintances, were to contract heavy bills, he would render her home too hot to hold her. Disliking the society of Lady Selina, he avoided it as much as he could, taking especial care that no expense was incurred at the hotel in which they every season resided, by extending invitations to any of her frequent visitors; and if she transgressed this established rule, no item in his weekly account betrayed the fact. It was, perhaps, owing

to the penurious habits of Mellingcourt,—habits which Lady Selina took no pains to conceal from her compassionate male friends,—that their attentions, invariably demonstrated by costly gifts, and a profuse supply of bank-notes, to preserve the dear creature from being exposed to the brutality of such a husband, were but of brief duration. Season after season saw some young man, new to the world, and with more money than prudence, attached to the triumphal car of Lady Selina Mellingcourt; who, notwithstanding her reiterated complaints of the shameful conduct of her husband, in withholding her pin-money and refusing to pay her bills, managed to be always the best-dressed woman wherever she appeared,—a mystery which all her acquaintance in particular and the public in general declared it was not difficult to solve.

My father at length became the consoler of this lady; and he who had a young and

lovely wife, fondly devoted to him, pining in solitude in the country, while he, free as air, amused himself as if he had neither wife nor child, evinced a pity for this heartless and ill-conducted woman of the world, which it never occurred to him the position of his own wife was much more entitled to awaken. This unhallowed *liaison* had now existed for two years, and Lady Selina, grown artful as well as unprincipled, had acquired a considerable influence over him, by exciting his jealousy and piquing his vanity. Prodigal to excess, his generosity to her knew no bounds, and this induced her to spare no pains to keep alive an attachment she found to be so profitable. One instance of my father's folly will serve to shew to what extent both wife and husband were capable of taking advantage of it.

"I saw, to-day," said Lady Selina to him, "such a *parure* of turquoises and diamonds! It was the most beautiful I ever

beheld, and *so* cheap! I might have bought it, if Mr. Mellingcourt would only pay me one half the pin-money he owes me; but, mean as he is, he never will. I never previously longed so much for anything!" —a strong assertion, as her ladyship's longings were neither few nor unfrequent.

"Where did you see it?" inquired my father.

"At ——'s," replied she; "but do not let us talk any more about it, for it only makes me long for what I cannot possess."

The next day, the *parure* was brought to her by my father, and, after some well-enacted scruples about accepting so expensive a gift, was received.

"But if Mr. Mellingcourt should notice it?" said the lady.

"I do not think he is peculiarly observant!" answered my father, with a smile that might have alarmed the delicacy of most other women.

"Nevertheless, this is so very splendid a *parure*, that, unobservant as he is with regard to other things, I fear he would inevitably notice it, and it might lead to mischief."

"What, then, is to be done?" asked the gentleman.

"A thought occurs to me," said the lady. "It is now so long a time since I have asked him for money, that he cannot decently refuse me some. He knows nothing of the value of precious stones,"—(an assertion which she was by no means justified in making,)—"I will shew him this fine *parure*—tell him it is the property of a lady in distress, who, owing to the exigency of the case, is willing to dispose of it for less than a quarter of its value, and ask him to pay me three hundred pounds of the pin-money he owes me, to enable me to purchase so great a bargain. This is so reasonable, and it must be so obvious, even to his eyes, that this *parure* is worth infinitely

more, that he cannot well refuse; so I can then wear your beautiful gift without fear."

"As you will," said my father, somewhat disgusted at this proof of cunning in the lady of his love.

The next day he found her in tears, and to his anxious inquiries as to the cause, she told him that, on displaying the turquoises and diamonds to her husband, he had, after minutely examining them, immediately retained the *parure*, and in spite of her exertions to prevent him, had taken it to a jeweller's, who having estimated it at three thousand pounds, he had sold it to him for that sum, (being one thousand less than my father had the previous day paid for it to the same jeweller,) and had given her three hundred pounds to pay "the lady in distress," lodging two thousand seven hundred, as he told her, in the funds, with his savings.

"Whenever you can purchase such ex-

cellent bargains," said he spitefully to me, "you may always come to me, for I like buying with hundreds what I can sell for thousands."

Lady Selina's tears flowed afresh as she recounted this trait of her husband, and my father experienced no increase of respect for either husband or wife while he listened to it. Nevertheless, he the next day repurchased the jewels, and restored them to Lady Selina, assuring her that Mr. Mellingcourt was not so accurate an observer as to notice them on her in a crowded assembly, or if he even did, she might impose on him by asserting that they were false ones, made in imitation of the real *parure* he had sold. "But," added my father, "I earnestly advise you never to let them into his hands, lest he might take it into his head to have them examined by a jeweller, and dispose of them again, and never more offer him any bargains."

CHAPTER XII.

Although heartily despising Mellingcourt, the admirer of his wife was compelled to conciliate him by every means in his power, and none were found so effective as those that saved the purse of this mean-spirited and parsimonious man, who was so vile as not to hesitate taking advantage of civilities or hospitalities procured, as he shrewdly suspected, solely on account of his wife. He professed to be fond of shooting, but disliked the trouble of hiring a manor; hence the *ami de la maison* for the time being was

sure to offer one, and, moreover, to keep open house during the shooting season, Mellingcourt, of course, Lady Selina, and a few friends of congenial tastes and habits, being invited to meet them. This despicable conduct, which in a poor man would have drawn down the most ignominious censures on his head, was much less harshly viewed in Mellingcourt, who was universally believed to be a *millionaire*, and consequently was treated, as the rich always are, much more leniently than the poor.

The *liaison* of my father and Lady Selina was much talked of at first, but after a time people got used to it; and as her husband found no fault with her conduct, and always appeared with her in public, she continued to be received in society by those scrupulous people who would have closed their doors against women who happened either to have less accommodating husbands, or who were less adroit in duping them.

The last two seasons my father had hired manors, that Mellingcourt might have his shooting, while he enjoyed the society of Lady Selina, but that lady becoming fearful that some prudish women of her acquaintance, with whom she wished to be on good terms, were taking alarm, not at her conduct, but at this open display of it, she expressed her desire that the next shooting season should be passed at my father's own seat, where the presence of his irreproachable and injured wife would give an air of respectability to the party. It was not without considerable reluctance that he consented to this proposal, for a consciousness of his own bad treatment towards my gentle mother haunted and embarrassed him in her presence, and rendered him unwilling to bring his associates in contact with her. Lady Selina, however, carried her point, and having got my father to engage Mr. and Mrs. Audley, with some young men,

who lived much in their society, to accompany her, the whole party, as already shewn, arrived at Meredith Park.

When questioned about the looks of his wife by Lady Selina, as had been more than once the case, my father had spoken of her as a person who possessed little personal attractions—at least, as he said, to his taste —and who was cold in feeling, but gentle and ladylike in manner. The first glance convinced Lady Selina of the falsehood of the former statement, and she resented it nearly as much as she would have done had her admirer really rendered justice to the beauty of his neglected wife, for it convinced her he was insincere. Of the correctness of the second statement, as to the coldness of my mother, she was also incredulous, for the changing colour and expressive countenance that met her gaze told a different tale. She glanced reproachfully at her admirer, while these thoughts passed through

her mind, and the looks of surprise and admiration lavished on my mother by all the men of the party, save my father alone, increased her dissatisfaction. When the party adjourned to dress for dinner, Mrs. Audley entered the dressing-room of Lady Selina Mellingcourt, and, affecting an air of perfect innocence, said, "Had you any idea, my dear friend, that Mrs. Spencer Meredith was so very beautiful? I had always fancied that she was rather plain than otherwise, and was really surprised when I saw how mistaken I had been. Not even her dowdy and old-fashioned dress could conceal or disfigure her charms, and I saw all the men gazing at her with astonishment and admiration."

Every word of this speech made the impression desired by the speaker on her *dear friend;* nevertheless, Lady Selina was too much a woman of the world to let her feelings be exposed. She summoned, therefore, all the *sang froid* she could assume to her

aid, and calmly answered, "Yes, I too was surprised, agreeably so, indeed, by the beauty of our fair hostess, and when we have persuaded her, as I hope we soon shall, to adopt a fashionable dress, she will be charming. I observed that the men were struck with admiration when they saw her; so much so, as to listen with less than their usual delight to your lively and piquant remarks, my dear friend."

"Oh! that is quite natural, *ma belle amie*," replied Mrs. Audley, "and I forgive them; but I really felt disposed to resent their immediate transfer of admiration from your handsome self to this new beauty, for whom alone they seem to have eyes. Mr. Audley just told me that he heard them say, and the saucy man admitted that *he* was of the same opinion, that when she appeared in London, and they each and all declared they would urge her to go to town next season, she would eclipse every woman there."

"She is not only very lovely, but I should think, very clever too," said Lady Selina. "There is a peculiar archness in her smile, and a sort of epigrammatic point in her remarks, that bid fair to rival many, if not all our would-be female wits and *bas bleus* in London. But bless me! it is seven o'clock, and we shall hardly have time to dress for dinner!" And the two *dear friends* separated, satisfied in the conviction that they had given each other mutual pain in their brief *tête-à-tête*.

My father sought the dressing-room of his wife, not to press her to his heart, as most husbands, after so long a separation, might have done, but to reproach her on the subject of her dress.

"For Heaven's sake, Edith," said he, "why have you not conformed to the present fashion? Your dress is positively ridiculous; and I am sure my friends must have had some difficulty in not betraying

their sense of its absurdity in your presence. If you are indifferent to the ridicule you must excite, you ought, for my sake, at least, to dress a little more like other people."

"I am sorry——"

"Pray don't begin the old story, Edith, nor assume the tragic air. Endeavour, as quickly as possible, to have your dresses altered; and Lady Selina Mellingcourt, who is reckoned the best-dressed woman in London, will, I am sure, if you ask her, allow her *femme de chambre* to give yours the patterns of her attire, that you may be enabled to appear a little more like other women, and not draw ridicule on me, as well as on yourself, by appearing in the fashion of three or four seasons ago."

And this was the first meeting alone between my father and mother after so long an absence; and thus it was that he rewarded the patience with which his coldness

and neglect had been borne, and the gentleness with which his wishes, however contrary to her own, had ever been met and complied with by his mild and amiable wife.

My mother suppressed a deep sigh as she told her faithful servant that it was necessary that some of her apparel should be modernized as speedily as possible, as Mr. Meredith was displeased at her not having attended to the present fashion. "I will ask Lady Selina Mellingcourt to permit her maid to shew you some of her dresses," continued my mother, "that mine may be altered to a similar form." At that moment she caught the countenance of Mrs. Lockly reflected in the mirror, before which she was arranging her hair, and its expression of dissatisfaction surprised her. "I wish I had adopted your advice, Lockly," said my mother, kindly, "and had had some new dresses sent down from London, Mr. Meredith would have then been satisfied."

A sigh was the only notice taken of this remark; and my mother, looking again in the glass, saw that her attendant's eyes were filled with tears, which she was brushing away with the back of her hand, as if anxious to conceal them.

When the party assembled in the library before dinner, the extreme elegance of the toilette of Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley struck my mother with admiration. Free from a particle of envy, she gazed with pleasure at the becoming and well-fitting robes of both ladies; and then glancing at her own, admitted that her husband had reason to find fault with it. The males of the party had eyes only for the beauty of my mother, which no dress could obscure; but the women could scarcely restrain their smiles when they noticed her toilette, which now, in the full glare of a well-lighted apartment, offered a striking and not favourable contrast to

their own. Lady Selina Mellingcourt glanced from my mother to my father, with an expression of irony on her countenance, that revealed what was passing in her mind; and he looked at his wife with such sternness and dislike, that she, who happened at the moment to catch his glance, became as pale as marble. Seated between both his lady-guests at dinner, my father endeavoured to manifest an equal attention to each; but even a total stranger might have observed that the looks often interchanged between him and Lady Selina denoted an intelligence and intimacy of no common order. Lords Algernon, Montagu, and Henry Buttevant, devoted themselves exclusively to their fair hostess; and their lively conversation and piquant anecdotes, often, during the repast, withdrew her from the painful reflections which, in spite of her endeavours to chase them away, would intrude themselves, as she marked the total indifference

of her husband's manner towards herself, and compared it with the desire to please evinced by him to the ladies on each side of him. Nor did the more than ordinary attention paid by my father to Mr. Mellingcourt escape my mother's notice. The most dainty dishes and choicest wines were pressed on that gentleman.

"Let me recommend these *filets de volaille* to you, the truffles are excellent;" or, "Pray give me your opinion of this claret, I think you will like it," would the host say to Mellingcourt, while he allowed his other guests to take care of themselves, an attention which was hardly noticed by him to whom it was directed, but who continued to eat voraciously the good things set before him, and to wash them down with frequent bumpers of wine. Not unseldom did Lady Selina glance at her husband, as, with eyes intently fixed on his plate, he devoured its contents; but he was

too busily engaged to notice her. And then she would look at my father, and turn up her eyes in horror at the gluttony of her *caro-sposo*. These appeals for sympathy never failed to be met with the kindest looks by her admirer, and were noticed by every species of ridicule consistent with *bienséance* by Mrs. Audley, who expressed her regret that poor Mr. Mellingcourt had lost his appetite, or else was dissatisfied with Mr. Spencer Meredith's cook.

The conversation having turned on the recent death of a man of very large fortune, Mellingcourt inquired what was the supposed extent of his wealth. Some one having named it, he said, "I think nothing of that—why, the income of my funded property amounts to double that sum." And he looked around, that he might note the effect produced by this declaration on others. Alas for poor human nature! nearly every

person at the table, except the hostess, assumed an air of greater respect towards him, the very servants glancing at him with a kind of awe. My mother, surprised and disgusted at this vulgar boasting, felt less than ever disposed to like the woman who could have married such a man, and whose presence imposed so little restraint on his behaviour.

When the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, Lady Selina, with one of her most insinuating smiles, offered my mother the patterns of her dresses, and added, that her *femme de chambre* would readily assist in altering those of Mrs. Spencer Meredith. As this favour had not been solicited, nor even hinted at by my mother, she felt a painful emotion at Lady Selina thus inadvertently exposing the terms of familiarity on which she must be with my father, when he could speak to her of the dress of his wife, and solicit her interference on the

subject. She nevertheless thanked Lady Selina, and accepted the offer, saying, that leading so retired a life in the country, she had neglected to pay as much attention to the fashion of her *toilette* as she ought to have done, and gracefully acknowledged that her obsolete dress required the indulgence of those who, unlike herself, had spent the last season in London.

"But do you never see any of your female neighbours who could have enlightened you on a subject so important to all women as the fashions must ever be?" said Mrs. Audley.

"Occasionally," replied my mother. "Lady Ravenshaw, Lady Emily Mordaunt, and Mrs. Compton Davenport, are the only neighbours within a visiting distance. They are very kind, but know that I care so little about the mode, that they let me adhere to that which was universal some five or six years ago, when I was dis-

posed to take a greater interest in the subject."

"So that disagreeable woman, Lady Ravenshaw, visits here!" said Lady Selina Mellingcourt, who having heard of the influence that personage had formerly exercised over my father, indulged in no peculiar good-will towards her.

"I do not think her nearly so disagreeable as Lady Emily Mordaunt," observed Mrs. Audley, "for she is so *pretentieuse*, and gives herself such airs, that she is my favourite aversion."

"Does not Lady Ravenshaw bore you to death, when she comes here?" asked Lady Selina, addressing my mother.

"I have received so much kindness from her," was the reply, "that it would be ungrateful in me to dislike her."

"I thought it was Mr. Spencer Meredith who had been so much indebted to her for kindness," observed Mrs. Audley, with a

malicious smile, which brought a blush to the cheek of Lady Selina, who felt that this innuendo revealed the cause of *her* peculiar distaste for Lady Ravenshaw, while my mother's purity of mind rendered her wholly impervious to the shaft aimed by Mrs. Audley.

"I trust that I may not meet Lady Ravenshaw," said Lady Selina; "for, never on friendly terms, we have latterly left off bowing, and a rencounter would consequently be anything but agreeable under such circumstances."

"And Lady Emily Mordaunt, who looks like a flower that faded from want of watering,—is she as coquettish in the country as in London?" asked Mrs. Audley.

"I never knew that she was coquettish anywhere," replied my mother; "and have ever found her very goodnatured and unaffected."

"It is you, my dear madam," said Lady

Selina, "who are so goodnatured yourself, that you judge too favourably of others;" and, suppressing a yawn, she looked at Mrs. Audley with such *ennui* and weariness pictured in her face, that my mother, who caught a view of it, became more than ever sensible how ineffectual would be her efforts to amuse two women with whom she had not a thought or feeling in common, and who were only lively in the society of men.

She felt as much relieved as the other two ladies when the gentlemen came to coffee. The champagne had evidently exhilarated their spirits, and Lord Henry Buttevant, having taken a seat beside Mrs. Audley, commenced a flirtation with her that surprised no one in the circle except the hostess, while my father devoted his attention wholly to Lady Selina Mellingcourt. Cards were introduced; a whist-table was established; those who did not play betted; and the stakes were so high,

that my mother no longer wondered at the all-absorbing interest which the whist-players devoted to the game. Mr. Mellingcourt bore not his reverses at the card-table with that equanimity generally exhibited by well-bred men, at least in the presence of women, nor concealed his exultation when fortune favoured him. The rudeness of his recriminations whenever his partner committed an error in playing, shocked his hostess, and his unchecked ill-breeding towards his wife disgusted her.

"You are surprised, I see," said Lord Algernon Montagu to my mother, whose expressive countenance he had been watching for a considerable time. "What a man that Mellingcourt is, or rather, what an animal. And yet he is tolerated in society! Can a stronger proof be given of the power of wealth? Naturally underbred and ill-tempered, I really believe he takes a pleasure in displaying defects that the generality

of persons carefully conceal; and he imagines that his fortune privileges him to be rude."

"I suppose that a generous expenditure, and more than an ordinarily profuse hospitality, has acquired him the indulgence he meets with," said my mother.

"By no means!" answered Lord Algernon. "His parsimonious habits extend to positive meanness. He never gives a dinner, although he accepts with avidity all those he is invited to partake; and openly laughs at what he calls the folly of his Amphytrions, in lavishing large sums of money in entertaining their acquaintances. The possession of wealth is, in his opinion, the best claim to distinction; and those deficient in it, whatever may be their merit, he looks upon as not being entitled to respect. In short, he is an odious person; but you will, I fear, set me down as a *mauvaise langue*, for thus revealing what all London is *au fait* of, so I must redeem my character by not telling

you all the evil that might be told of Mr. Mellingcourt. Of his good qualities, only one has been as yet discovered—namely, his perfect freedom from jealousy; for though Lady Selina has frequently put it to the proof, he has never evinced a single symptom of having even the slightest acquaintance with ‘ the green-eyed monster.’”

My mother having looked grave at this implied censure of a woman who was a guest at her house, Lord Algernon Montagu deprecated her displeasure by given her amusing sketches of London society; which, having tact enough to see that she disliked scandal and sarcasm, he rendered inoffensive, though entertaining.

While this conversation was going on, my mother occasionally found the eyes of Lady Selina directed towards her, and then turned to my father, as if to call his attention to her. He looked displeased, while Lady Selina smiled, and again, from time to time,

renewed her glances towards my mother. At length, the *pendule* struck twelve, and seeing that the whist-players were cutting for partners for another rubber, my mother walked to the table, and ventured to remind my father, in a low voice, that the Sabbath had commenced.

"The what?" asked he.

"The Sabbath!" repeated his wife, meekly.

"And what has that to do with our amusing ourselves?" demanded he, rudely.

"I thought," replied my mother, "that you had forgotten the hour."

"There are some people who never allow one to forget the flight of time," said he, bitterly; "but I can't see any harm in our continuing our whist."

"You will much oblige me by giving it over," urged my mother, mildly; and the sandwich-tray and refreshments being at that moment brought in, the party rose

from the table, exchanging significant looks at each other; while my father muttered something about his dislike to Methodists.

"*Apropos* of the Sabbath," said Lady Selina Mellingcourt. "At what hour do you go to church, Mrs. Meredith?"

"At ten, precisely," was the answer; and my mother caught her husband making a sign to Lady Selina indicative of his disapproval of her going to church. A pang shot through her breast as she observed it, for many a time, during the courting-days of my father and herself, had he directed similar signs to her whenever he wished her to decline any proposed excursion or project of her father's; and now, that fond parent in his grave, and she neglected by him so loved, these looks were directed to another, and that other—a wife!

"You surely do not mean to act the pious, and go to church to-morrow?" said Mrs. Audley to Lady Selina.

"Certainly, I mean to go," replied Lady Selina.

"Well, I am not so good," observed Mrs. Audley, "for early rising always disagrees so much with me, that I should be ill for the day were I to get up at such an hour; so you must pray for me, ladies."

"As they will pray for all sinners, *you* will be included, *ma chère amie*," said Mr. Audley, laughing at what he considered to be his own wit.

"I understand we are to have a charity sermon to-morrow," observed Lord Algernon Montagu, "and of course Mellingcourt will attend, in order to make his offering."

"No, I leave you to do that," replied Mellingcourt, "as younger brothers are always generous, having more money than they require for their own wants."

A few minutes after my mother had entered her dressing-room, my father presented himself there, and having desired

her attendant Lockly to withdraw, he no sooner found himself *tête-à-tête* with his wife, than he expressed to her, with no little acerbity, his surprise and disapprobation at her interrupting his whist-party, and in *his* house attempting to dictate.

"You are at perfect liberty," said he, "to follow your own illiberal and contracted notions relative to religious practices, but I desire that you will not attempt to interfere with those of my friends, nor render my house disagreeable to them."

So saying, he quitted the room, leaving my mother to weep in uncontrollable anguish at this new proof of his unkindness—an unkindness which neither her submission nor gentleness could subdue.

And this was the man to wed with whom she had wrung the reluctantly given consent of her fond father—a consent only accorded when he believed that her health, if not her life, depended on the measure; and she had

abandoned that fond father, had allowed him to pass his latter days in solitude, and to die alone. How truly, bitterly, had the judgment pronounced by him on the object on whom she had placed her affections been verified! With what a gushing tenderness did the recollection of that lost parent's indulgent and never-failing kindness now recur to her mind, when smarting under the painful sense of the more than indifference of *him* for whom she had quitted the happy home of her childhood and the fond arms of her father! How short-lived had been the happiness for which she had sacrificed so much! And now, save her child, what comfort was left to her? Never does the heart of woman turn with such tenderness to the loved and lost—those dear ones, from whom she had experienced only indulgence and affection, as when disappointed in the *living*, those in whom she had garnered up her heart; she looks in vain for consolation

on earth. Then does the sigh heave her agonized heart, and fast-falling tears dim her weary eyes, until, overpowered by the depth and bitterness of her emotions, she feels that to Heaven alone must she address herself for aid to support her trials, and she sinks on her knees to offer up her prayers to that throne of mercy where the wretched ever find relief.

Long and fervently did my mother supplicate the Almighty that night; and when she laid her head on her pillow, her spirit was calmed, and her tears dried.

CHAPTER XIII.

The next morning, Lockly informed her that breakfast was ordered to be served at twelve o'clock, but that Lord Algernon Montagu wished to have his in time to attend the church service.

"And Lady Selina Mellingcourt will also breakfast with me," said my mother, "for she will accompany me to church; so order breakfast for three."

When my mother descended to the eating-room, she found Lord Algernon alone there; and in a few minutes after, a message was

delivered to her, stating that Lady Selina Mellingcourt had slept so ill, and had so bad a head-ache, that she could not have the pleasure of accompanying Mrs. Spencer Meredith to church.

"I could have sworn that this would happen," said Lord Algernon Montagu. "Lady Selina has the most accommodating head-aches in the world, for they come and go at her command."

My mother felt the awkwardness of a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with a person she had never seen before the previous day; and the freedom with which he was disposed to comment on Lady Selina Mellingcourt increased her embarrassment. The repast over, the carriage was announced to be at the door; and my mother retired to put on her cloak and bonnet. When she descended, she found Lord Algernon Montagu waiting in the vestibule, to hand her into her carriage.

"I must beg permission to take a seat,"

said he; and suiting the action to the word, he entered the carriage, which was driven from the door, he appearing perfectly at his ease, while my mother felt painfully embarrassed at the new and uncomfortable position of being thus familiarized with a stranger, and at having to enter a crowded church with him.

"I fear that I am an unwelcome intruder," said Lord Algernon Montagu, half offended at the coldness and reserve of my mother's manner.

"I could have wished," replied she, "that Mr. Spencer Meredith had accompanied us, for it pains me that he should neglect attending divine worship."

"It would, at all events, have the merit of novelty, and that is something," observed Lord Algernon; "for I never knew him to enter a church during the last two shooting seasons that we have passed together, although the parish church was only a quarter

of a mile from the house he rented in Norfolk."

A deep sigh was the only notice taken by my mother of this insidious speech, and again her companion renewed his comments.

"I was very much amused last evening," said he, "when I heard Lady Selina Mellingcourt propose to accompany you to church, and still more so when I saw Meredith making signals to convey to her his disapproval of such a measure, when I dare be sworn she had not the slightest intention of going. Mrs. Audley, and Buttevant, are more frank, for they openly profess their dislike to going to church."

"I hope they will not do so to me," said my mother, "for I consider such frankness, as you are pleased to term it, extremely offensive."

The carriage having at that moment reached the porch of the church, further remarks were prevented; and as my mother

entered it, all eyes being directed to her, she felt her cheeks glow at being seen *tête-à-tête* with a stranger, instead of being accompanied by her husband, with whose return home the whole of the neighbourhood was acquainted. She thought—but perhaps it might be only fancy—that some of the congregation examined her and Lord Algernon Montagu with a curiosity in which no small portion of impertinence was mingled; but a sense of what was due to the sacred temple in which she found herself, checked these wandering thoughts, and restored her to that deep and heartfelt devotion that never failed to animate her breast when in the house of God.

The eyeglass of Lord Algernon Montagu was frequently raised during the service, to which he appeared to shew very little attention. He looked around as if in a theatre, instead of a place of divine worship; and having noticed two or three pretty girls in

the adjacent pews, regarded them more frequently than the prayer-book which the pew-opener had placed on the desk before him. The sermon referred so particularly to the sinfulness of those who neglect attendance at divine worship, and who think only of the pleasures and vain enjoyments of the world, that my mother could not help thinking that it had been selected by Mr. Aubrey, the good rector, with the intention of producing some effect on the mind of her husband. The discourse was an eloquent one, and appealed powerfully to the feelings, for the preacher was deeply impressed with the importance of his subject. He drew a forcible picture of the state of that man who, passing his time in sinful pleasures, saw the approach of death with terror and dismay, and dared not trust in the efficacy of a deathbed repentance. Many persons looked towards the pew in which my mother was seated during the sermon, and the con-

sciousness that they considered several portions of it applicable to her husband, pained and mortified her. The irreverent conduct of her companion, too, was very annoying, and she heartily wished him away, being convinced that no salutary change would be effected by his attendance at divine worship, while he conducted himself so improperly as he was then doing.

The service over, Lady Ravenshaw, Lady Emily Mordaunt, and Mrs. Compton Davenport, drew up in the porch of the church, to await my mother's approach. The first salutations over, Lord Algernon Montagu, who was an old acquaintance of both the first-mentioned ladies, was greeted with expressions of mingled surprise and pleasure by them.

"Who could have dreamed of seeing you here?" said Lady Ravenshaw.

"I could not believe my eyes when I saw

you enter the church," observed Lady Emily Mordaunt.

"Were you ever before at church, since you left college?" asked Lady Ravenshaw.

"No, I'll answer for him," replied Lady Emily. "He has a fair excuse, however, for coming here," continued she, "for even an infidel would be delighted to accompany Mrs. Spencer Meredith!"

"And so, I hear, you have a large party," said Lady Ravenshaw, "and that Lady Selina Mellingcourt and her husband are among the number. Well, I confess *that did* surprise me. And how do *you* like this lady, my dear Mrs. Spencer Meredith?"

"I have seen so little of her, that it would be difficult to pronounce any opinion on so short an acquaintance," replied my mother. "She only arrived yesterday evening."

"How long does she intend to remain?" demanded Lady Ravenshaw.

"I have not the least notion," was the answer.

"Really, my dear friend, it is quite preposterous that you should permit yourself to be treated in such a manner. Two women, of whom you know nothing, are brought down to your house without any invitation *from* you, and yet are domiciled *with* you, *sans ceremonie*. Had these ladies possessed one spark of delicacy or good breeding, they would not, under any circumstances, and particularly under *existing* ones"—and Lady Ravenshaw laid a peculiar stress on the word—"have intruded themselves on you. The world will make very severe animadversions on *your* countenancing them, I can assure you; and it will be in vain that your friends, Lady Emily Mordaunt, Mrs. Compton Davenport, and myself, shall assert your ignorance of the reputations of your female visitors, and of the *circumstance* that renders one of

them, at least, a *peculiarly* unfit guest for you."

"Yes," interrupted Lady Emily Mordaunt, "you really ought not to submit to this insult on the part of your husband; I know it will injure you in the eyes of the world, and so thinks Mrs. Compton Davenport."

"I must acknowledge," said that lady, "that my opinion perfectly coincides with that of Lady Ravenshaw and Lady Emily Mordaunt; but at the same time I must entreat you not to name *me* in any remonstrance you may be disposed to make to Mr. Spencer Meredith, for it might embroil my husband with him, which would be very disagreeable indeed, on account of the support he has always given Mr. Compton Davenport in his elections."

"*We* can't visit you while Lady Selina Mellingcourt is your guest," said Lady Ravenshaw. "You know how prudish Lord Ravenshaw is."

"And Mr. Mordaunt, too," added Lady Emily.

"*I* may, through motives of policy, be compelled to make acquaintance with these ladies," observed the wife of the M.P. for the county; "for Mr. Spencer Meredith would very probably resent any slight offered to them while in his house; and my husband would never forgive me if I offended his most powerful supporter in the county. Nevertheless, it is very disagreeable, my dear madam, to act against one's conscience, as I shall certainly do, in making the acquaintance of Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley."

"I am really at a loss to understand what all this means," said my mother. "Are not Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley universally received in the best society?"

"I do not deny that they are," replied Mrs. Compton Davenport; "but really, after what Lady Ravenshaw and Lady Emily

Mordaunt have told me of their conduct, I think they do not merit this toleration."

"And so *you* also would think," added Lady Ravenshaw, "if you knew what the world proclaims with regard to the friendship of Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mr. Spencer Meredith."

My mother's cheeks became suffused with blushes. Shame and indignation struggled for mastery in her breast, but the latter triumphing, she proudly informed her *soi-disant* friends, that she was sure Mr. Spencer Meredith would introduce no ladies to her that were not fit and proper acquaintances; and she requested that in future she might be spared from similar communications.

No sooner had she entered her carriage than Lord Algernon Montagu remarked how very amusing it was to hear two women, whose adventures had furnished such frequent topics to the Scandalous Chronicle as Lady Ravenshaw and Lady Emily Mordaunt

had done, betray so much severity towards persons accused of no deeper errors than their own. "But so it ever is," continued he; "those who are the most erring are always the first to attack others. People never can have said more about the *friendship* of Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Meredith than was said about his friendship with this same Lady Ravenshaw, whose prudery sits very awkwardly on her in the eyes of those who, like myself, are acquainted with her past proceedings. It is absurd that *she* should betray a jealousy towards Meredith, that you, his wife, have too much *savoir vivre* to exhibit. The young and beautiful, however, are seldom addicted to jealousy, and for an obvious reason—the facility afforded them by the possession of these attractions to make reprisals. And well do husbands who neglect youthful and handsome wives, to devote themselves to women in no way worthy to be compared with

them, deserve retaliation; and fortunate is he to whom devolves the happiness of assisting in perpetrating so just an act of vengeance. Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Spencer Meredith?"

"The subject is one so unfit to meet the ears of a right-minded woman, that I am as much surprised that you should enter on it with me, Lord Algernon Montagu, as that you should ask my opinion."

The gravity with which my mother uttered this well-merited reproof silenced her companion for a few minutes; and when he was about to utter an apology, the carriage stopped at her door, and she was relieved from his presence. Shouts of laughter met her ears as she approached the breakfast-room, and when the servant had thrown open the door, she beheld Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mr. Audley engaged in playing battledore and shuttlecock, while the gentlemen of the party were betting largely on

the game, and vociferating their encouragement to the players. The entrance of my mother evidently produced a disagreeable effect on all present, but more especially on my father, who did not attempt to disguise his ill-humour at the interruption to the game.

"What!" said he, "returned already? Old Aubrey must have given you a much shorter sermon than he usually favours his congregation with, to enable you to be back so soon. And you too, I find, are turned religious," continued he, addressing himself to Lord Algernon Montagu, with a satirical smile, shared by Lady Selina Mellingcourt, who assured my mother, that to *her* must be attributed the merit of Lord Algernon's conversion.

"Yet knowing Montagu as we do," said Lord Henry Buttevant, "*church* is the last place to which I should expect him to lead, or be led by, a lady."

This stupid remark caused a laugh from the group, and Lord Algernon begged them to remember that it was only *single* ladies that he objected to conduct to church, but that he had great pleasure in accompanying married ones.

"I have been forming a friendship with your son this morning," said Lady Selina Mellingcourt, addressing my mother. "He is a charming boy, and I have been making him better acquainted with his father."

"It will require all your amiability to tame down the little savage!" observed my father, "for I never saw so spoiled a child."

At this moment, I rushed into the room, and throwing my arms around my mother's neck, nearly stifled her with my kisses.

"You see he can be very loving when he likes to be so," said Mr. Mellingcourt. "This morning Lady Selina coaxed him with sugarplums for half-an-hour before he would consent to kiss her."

"An irrefragable proof of his bad taste!" remarked my father.

"Why did you dislike kissing this pretty lady?" asked Lord Algernon.

"She is *not* a pretty lady," answered I; "it is mamma who is pretty."

Some of the party laughed aloud at my *naïveté*, but my father bit his lip in anger; and though Lady Selina smiled, the increased colour in her cheeks announced that she did not much relish my frankness.

"You are a stupid dolt!" said my father, "for every one thinks this lady"—pointing to Lady Selina—"pretty, and every one would be glad to have the good fortune offered to you."

"*You* may kiss her," answered I, "as much as you please, and she wont be angry."

The lady's cheek grew crimson, her friend Mrs. Audley tittered, and the men, with the exception of Mr. Mellingcourt and my father, laughed outright.

"Leave the room, you stupid boy!" said the latter, "and do not come among us again unless you are sent for."

I ran to my mother and clung to her side, while I exclaimed—"Indeed, mamma, I have not been naughty! but I did not want to kiss that lady whom papa kissed."

"Send him away, the troublesome little story-teller!" said my father, his face flushed with anger, and that of Lady Selina scarcely less crimsoned.

My mother rose, and taking me by the hand, led me from the room; but ere she could reach the door, I again assured her "I did not tell a story, and that papa kissed the lady." I felt my mother's hand tremble as she held mine, and I remarked that she grew very pale.

"Don't be vexed, dear mamma!" said I, "and I will be so good; but I don't know what I have done to make papa angry. Is it naughty to refuse kissing ladies? or is it wicked to tell when papa kisses them?"

My mother seemed at a loss what to say; but, after a moment's hesitation, she pressed me to her heart, and told me never to repeat what I saw unless papa or mamma asked me.

Lady Selina Mellingcourt evinced considerable embarrassment during the remainder of the day; her husband appeared sullen; and my father displayed a more than ordinary degree of sternness, as if to awe and deter my mother from recurring to my awkward disclosure. The rest of the Sabbath was passed as none had hitherto been beneath that roof. The whole party played at billiards before they rode out, and returned not until an hour after the one named for dinner. When the ladies left the dining-room, Mrs. Audley sat down to the pianoforte and sang *barcaroles*, while Lady Selina Mellingcourt kept up, with evident effort, a desultory conversation with my mother, often interrupted by half-suppressed yawns and other symptoms of *ennui*.

On the Sabbath evening my mother had been, during the absence of my father, accustomed to assemble her small household in the dining-room, and to read the evening service and a short sermon to them. To continue this custom would, she now felt, be the cause of an angry discussion with my father, and she consequently did not attempt it; but when making this sacrifice in order to avoid his sarcastic reproofs, she was not prepared to see him, when tea had been removed, order cards. She cast an imploring look at him, but he met it only by a stern frown. She then approached him, and, in a low tone of voice, entreated that he would not play on the Sabbath; but this appeal only served to excite his wrath, and petulantly telling her that he would do as he pleased in his own house, he invited his guests to cut for partners.

Lord Algernon Montagu drew a chair near his hostess, and in his most insinuating

tone, told her that as *she* disapproved cards he had declined playing. "You see I am not incorrigible," said he; "and if *you* would but encourage my religious aspirations, you might bring back a lost sheep to the fold."

My mother maintained an air of reserve and coldness in the hope of checking the tone of familiarity this flippant young man assumed towards her; and turning away from him, beheld significant smiles exchanged between Lady Selina Mellingcourt and my father. She was half tempted to leave the room, that her presence might no longer sanction the desecration of the Sabbath; but a fear of exciting still more the anger of her husband, and by so doing rendering him more reckless than ever, deterred her. Although sitting at a distance from the card-table, she was made aware that large stakes were won and lost; angry exclamations and recriminations were ut-

tered by the losers; and she trembled to hear oaths pronounced, which, if no sense of religion or propriety checked, the presence of women ought to have prevented. This breach of decency convinced her more than all the assertions of her female neighbours in the morning; and the insinuations of Lord Algernon Montagu, that Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley had lost all right to the respect or consideration of the men with whom they were engaged at play, and the perfect *sang froid* with which they heard the curses, loud and deep, left no doubt, if, indeed, a doubt could have existed in her mind, that they were habituated to them. That her husband could thus insult her by bringing beneath the roof where she was content to live in seclusion with her child, women so lost to all sense of delicacy and propriety as to sanction such language—nay, not only to sanction, but to encourage by laughing at what

should have shocked them, inflicted a deep pang on her heart. While thus absorbed in painful reflections, she was unconscious that the eyes of Lord Algernon Montagu were fixed on her face with an expression of such undisguised admiration as to have drawn the attention of both the ladies, who, though engaged at the card-table, occasionally found time to watch the movements of her companion and herself.

"What would I not give to know the subject that has so deeply occupied your thoughts during the last half hour, that you have neither heard when spoken to, nor opened your lips," said Lord Algernon Montagu. "Judging by the gravity of your looks, I should pronounce that your reflections were of a sombre nature; and yet so young, so fair, and gifted with that great essential to happiness, wealth, I cannot divine what cause of chagrin you can have."

"Gravity does not always indicate cha-

grin," replied my mother. "But pray oblige me, Lord Algernon Montagu, by selecting any other subject of conversation save myself; for there is none you could choose that would not be more agreeable to me."

"But if *you* happen to be the only one I *can* think of, or speak of, what is to be done?" asked Lord Algernon, endeavouring to throw into his countenance as much tenderness as it could assume.

"Then I must decline conversing with you," replied my mother, coldly, and rising from her chair, she moved towards the card-table.

"Are you disposed to risk a few pounds on the rubber?" asked Mrs. Audley.

"I never bet, or play at cards," answered my mother.

"Then you have a great loss," observed Lady Selina Mellingcourt, "for cards offer the most delightful excitement to break the tiresome monotony of life."

"I am sure," added Mrs. Audley, "that more than half the women I know could not support existence without cards; but this you will discover when you have lived a few seasons in London."

"You have revoked, Meredith," said Lord Henry Buttevant, "which gives me the game. Look over the tricks, and you will see I am right."

"Yes," said my father, after having turned over the cards, "you are right, Buttevant, I have certainly revoked, but that was wholly owing to Mrs. Meredith's talking and confusing my memory. Before *you* came near the table," said my father, looking angrily at his wife, "I was winning every thing; but no sooner did you interrupt me, than I forgot my game, and committed this egregious error, by which I lose two hundred to you, Buttevant."

"Why, Mrs. Meredith hardly opened her lips," said Mr. Mellingcourt. "It was Mrs.

Audley and Lady Selina that kept talking."

"It's confoundedly annoying," resumed my father, not noticing Mr. Mellingcourt's exculpation of my mother, "when we were game and game, and that I had four by honours, and the odd trick, that I should lose all by Mrs. Meredith's coming here and interrupting our play. I wish she had stayed at the other end of the room, and then this could not have happened."

My mother grew pale, and her lips trembled as she attempted to speak. She keenly felt this open exhibition of dislike on the part of her husband—for to dislike alone could she attribute his unjust accusation of her interrupting his play,—as she felt certain that he was aware that it was not she, but the other two ladies, who had diverted his attention from his game. She felt displeased at observing Lord Algernon Montagu's eyes fixed on her with an ex-

pression of deep interest and pity, and saw Lady Selina Mellingcourt exchange glances with my father, as if directing his attention to this exhibition of Lord Algernon's sympathy.

The whist-party did not break up until a late hour. Mr. Mellingcourt congratulated himself on having won a considerable sum; and my father displayed an irritability that denoted he had no reason for self-gratulation. It was a relief to my mother that he did not, as on the previous night, enter her dressing-room, for she dreaded, fatigued and nervous as she felt, being exposed to another lecture, in the ill-humour in which he then was.

CHAPTER XIV.

While dressing for breakfast next morning, her faithful attendant, Lockly, betrayed various symptoms of agitation, and more than once cleared her throat as if to prepare for speaking.

"What is the matter, my good Lockly?" asked her gentle mistress. "You look discomposed."

"I really feel so, madam; and yet I do not know whether or not I ought to trouble you on the subject."

"If I can be of use to you, Lockly, do

not hesitate to reveal the cause of your uneasiness."

"I now wish, madam, that I had not touched on it, for, on reflection, I fear you cannot remedy what I have to complain of; and it is wrong of me to anoy you by repeating it."

"As you will, Lockly; but you know I have too great a regard for you not to take a lively interest in all that concerns you."

"I *do* know it, madam, and most grateful do I feel for your great kindness. The truth is, madam, that short as the period has been since my master and his company have arrived here, the house has been turned topsy-turvy by the ladies' maids and valets, and the new servants, playing cards, singing, and speaking evil on the Sabbath. Their impudence, too, is beyond all belief and bearing. Why, would you credit it, madam? these two French women had the

audacity to criticise your dress—nay, more, (pardon me for the repetition,) *to ridicule* it. They said, their ladies had told them that your dress was that worn years and years ago; and that you looked like a heroine in an old novel, just rescued from some dungeon where you had been long shut up by a cruel husband."

"Oh! if that be all, my good Lockly, pray don't let it vex you. My dresses *have* grown dreadfully old-fashioned, it is true; and you were quite right when you wished me to have some new ones."

"But they did not confine themselves to remarks on your dress alone, madam," resumed Lockly, positively sobbing with mingled feelings of tenderness for her gentle mistress and anger for her detractors; "they said it was no wonder my master stayed away so long and seemed ashamed——"

"Tell me no more, my good Lockly," said my mother, kindly, but firmly; "it is

not right that I should hear the conversation of the steward's room."

"Ah! madam, it is not right that you should be forced to keep company with ladies who, if only half what their servants say of them be true, are no fit companions for any lady of virtue and good conduct; and to think that *you*, madam, who are a an—yes," sobbed Lockly, "a *real*, perfect angel, if there ever was one on earth, should be——"

"Pray be calm, my poor Lockly," said my mother, pouring out a glass of water, and making her attendant, who was now grown hysterical, drink a portion of it.

"You must not, indeed you must not, repeat, nor, if possible, think of, the conversation of these people."

"But to be obliged to listen to their wickedness, and to see them romping in the most improper way with the valets, oh! madam, it is more than I can stand."

"Then you must take shelter in your own room, Lockly, where, with a good book, you can pass your time more profitably."

"And so I will, madam; and I beg your pardon for troubling you. I ought not—I now feel that I ought not—to have pestered you with all this; but it sha'nt happen again, that it sha'nt," said Lockly, wiping her eyes, and loving her mistress better than ever, as she noticed the paleness of her face, and rightly judged that it proceeded from the pain inflicted on her by her own ill-judged complaint. "Yes," thought Lockly to herself, "my good and gentle lady knows more than I thought, and *she* can bear it with patience; while I, like an unfeeling fool, must go to add to her affliction by repeating their bad conduct, which she, poor lady, has no power of preventing."

The late breakfast was hardly over, when the carriage of Mrs. Compton Davenport

drove to the door. My father looked pleased when that lady was announced, although, under different circumstances, he would have considered her visit a disagreeable interruption. He asked Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley to accompany my mother to the reception-room, and attended them himself, that he might mark the manner of Mrs. Compton Davenport towards them, inwardly determining that unless it was as polite and attentive as could be desired, her husband should not have his support at the next election. He had, however, no reason to be dissatisfied with his fair neighbour, for no sooner had she poured forth a profusion of civil speeches to my mother, and expressions of pleasure at his return, than she requested to have the honour of being presented to Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley, whose acquaintance she professed to have long desired an opportunity of forming.

When the ceremony of introduction was gone through, she addressed both ladies in a strain of adulation, which, notwithstanding that my mother was aware of the selfish motive for it, surprised and disgusted her. The whole party were warmly pressed to name a day to dine at Compton Park. "And now, my dear Mrs. Meredith," added its mistress, "I trust that as Mr. Spencer Meredith is returned, you will no longer be such a recluse, and that we shall have the happiness of seeing you frequently among us. You will hardly believe," continued she, addressing herself to my father, "that Mrs. Meredith has resisted the often-tried entreaties of all her neighbours to accept their hospitalities during your absence, and that she has not once dined with any of us."

"She has deprived herself of much gratification," said my father, bowing to Mrs. Compton Davenport, "and evinced any-

thing but good taste in avoiding such agreeable society."

Seeing that the wife of the county member was neither young nor good-looking, and was, moreover, disposed to be very civil to them, both Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley received her advances very graciously, and when she had departed, joined with their host in praising her apparent good nature and good humour. Lord Algernon Montagu could not repress a smile, which resembled a sneer, as he listened to these unmerited commendations.

"May I inquire your opinion of this good-natured lady?" said he to my mother. "She did not," continued he, "impress *me* with a very favourable notion of her good nature when we met her at church, on Sunday last, nor of her sincerity to-day."

Lady Selina Mellingcourt looked suspiciously towards my mother, and my father, somewhat angrily, observed, that *he*, who

had known Mrs. Compton Davenport for many years, had never the least cause to call in question either her good nature or sincerity.

The party proposed riding out to see an interesting ruin in the neighbourhood; and my mother, glad to be released from the presence of two ladies whose society afforded her no pleasure, saw them retire to prepare for their ride with satisfaction.

They had been gone above an hour, when, as she sate in the library, engaged in the perusal of a favourite author, Lord Algernon Montagu entered the room. The expression of my mother's face denoted that she felt more surprise than pleasure at seeing him, and he, unmindful of the coldness of her reception of him, congratulated himself on the good fortune of being furnished with an excuse, by the lameness of his horse, for leaving his party, and returning to the house. My mother, desirous of avoiding a

tête-à-tête, rang the bell, and ordered that I might be sent to her; but, unfortunately, I had been taken out to walk half an hour previously, and, consequently, she found herself condemned to submit to the *gêne* of Lord Algernon Montagu's company.

"How delighted I am to find you!" said he, looking at her with affected sentiment. "What a relief to exchange the society of two such women as Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley for yours!"

"I beg that you will choose some other subject," replied my mother; "for I dislike compliments, and especially such as are paid at the expense of other women."

"You are so superior to *all* women, that it would be absurd to institute comparisons. Yes, loveliest of women, who can see without admiring, who can know without loving you?"

My mother arose, with the intention of leaving the room, but Lord Algernon, placing

himself between her and the door, attempted to seize her hand, and declared she should not go until she had heard him. My mother's pride and delicacy was deeply wounded by this insolence; her countenance betrayed an indignation for which he was not prepared; and, somewhat awed, he fell on his knees, and intreated pardon for revealing a passion the violence of which had hurried him into its avowal. He again snatched her hand, which she was struggling to release from his grasp, when the servant threw open the door, and I bounded into the room, rushing eagerly to embrace her. Lord Algernon Montagu hastily, and in much embarrassment, arose from his kneeling posture; while I asked whether he had been naughty, and had been demanding pardon. My mother took my hand, and left the room, greatly agitated by the unexpected scene that had taken place, and deeply mortified that a servant had been a witness

to it. Close to the door, she encountered the footman, who had caught Lord Algernon on his knees before her, and her cheeks became flushed as she marked the expression of curiosity so visible in his face, and conjectured the unworthy suspicions to which the conduct of Lord Algernon was so well calculated to give rise. Tears filled her eyes as she reflected on the position in which she found herself placed; and my caresses and innocent assurances that Lord Algernon was very sorry for being naughty, and would not be so any more, did not soothe her feelings.

She remained a prisoner in her own room until the party returned at a late hour; when my father, having entered her dressing-room, told her, with no little asperity of manner, that on future occasions it would be more prudent, as well as correct, for her to accompany the ladies in their rides or drives, than to remain at home alone, to

encourage Lord Algernon Montagu to return for the purpose of enjoying her society *tête-à-tête.*"

"His attentions to you have already been so marked as to excite observation," continued he; "and though no one can accuse me of being addicted to jealousy, I confess that I have remarked with surprise the matter-of-course sort of air with which you receive them. What, for example, could be more extraordinary than your taking him to church alone in your carriage? Had this occurred in London, you would have furnished a topic of scandal for all the clubs and Sunday chronicles of slander."

"The fault was not mine," replied my mother. "I had no idea that I should be left in the awkward position of a *tête-à-tête* with a stranger on the Sabbath morning, or I should have breakfasted in my own room. Lady Selina Mellingcourt had offered to breakfast with me, and accompany me to

church; and it was not until I descended to the *salle à manger*, where I found Lord Algernon Montagu, that she sent her excuses for not fulfilling her promise. I knew not, without risking to incur the censure of rudeness, how to prevent Lord Algernon Montagu from accompanying me to church, although his presence was anything but agreeable to me."

"Then you should have remained at home, and if you must pray, have prayed in your own chamber."

"I have never, unless prevented by severe illness, omitted attending divine worship on the Sabbath-day."

"Spare me a homily on your religious notions," said my father, with a sneer; "learn, for it is high time you should, a little of *l'usage du monde*, of which you stand dreadfully in need, and which will enable you, without rudeness, to repel attentions too marked to be tacitly permitted

by any married woman who respects herself."

Thus saying, he quitted the room, leaving my poor mother to weep over this new proof of his injustice and unkindness.

CHAPTER XV.

The next day, returning with my *gouvernante* from a walk, when the party were at luncheon, I escaped from her, and tapping at the window of the dining-room, shewed my face, rosy from exercise, and my curls agitated by the wind. The animation of my countenance attracted my father; he arose from the table, opened the window, and bade me enter. I presented the bunch of wild flowers, which I had gathered in my ramble, to my mother, as had always been my wont, and, grown less timid, ventured to

look around. My eye fixed on Lord Algernon Montagu, and I asked him whether he was still as naughty as he had been the day before. He looked embarrassed, and my mother blushed deeply as she endeavoured to direct my attention from him, by asking me some question about my walk; but Lady Selina Mellingcourt maliciously demanded of what naughtiness Lord Algernon had been guilty?

"I don't know what he did," answered I; "but he knelt down and asked mamma's pardon on his knees, as I always do when I have been naughty; and mamma was very angry, and would not stay in the room with him."

Lady Selina Mellingcourt looked slily in my father's face; and he glanced angrily at my mother; while Lord Algernon Montagu, in much confusion, which he vainly strove to conceal, stammered something about his

having acted the naughty boy, and begged pardon for it, in play with me.

"No, no, you did not play with me," said I; "for when I came into the room, you were on your knees before mamma."

Some of the party laughed, others looked grave; but the expression of Lady Selina Mellingcourt's face, as she again regarded my father, was most malicious. My mother was so agitated, that I felt something was wrong, although I could not guess what it was. Thinking to soothe her, I asked her to forgive Lord Algernon, and promised that he would not be naughty any more. Then turning very gravely to the supposed delinquent, I informed him that he never must tell stories any more, for mamma did not like people who told untruths. This sage advice produced a laugh, in which it was evident that my father's attempt to join was not natural; but which Mr. Mellingcourt

greatly enjoyed, for he renewed it more than once, and beckoned me to his side, in order to elicit more particulars of what he considered to be so good a joke. He even ventured to make some ill-timed comments, well calculated to add to my father's ill humour, relative to the *espionage* of children, before the conclusion of which, I was dismissed from the room, conscious that I had said or done something that had displeased, but not aware of what it could be.

Afraid again to incur the reproof of her husband by staying at home, my mother determined to accompany the party on horseback, and retired to put on her riding-habit. She had only entered her dressing-room, when my father followed her, and angrily insisted on her explaining what I meant by saying that Lord Algernon Montagu had been on his knees to ask her pardon.

"That gentleman," answered she, "for-

getful of what was due to your hospitality, and to my honour, had the bad taste and folly to make me an avowal of attachment, as insolent as it was unwelcome."

"Why did you not instantly inform me of this?" demanded he.

"Because," replied my mother, "I treated his impertinence in a way that will, I believe, prevent a repetition, and I thought my informing you of it might lead to something disagreeable."

"You expected, no doubt, that I should either blow out his brains, or give him a chance of performing the same pleasant operation upon me," observed my father, with a sneer. "All ladies, and particularly romantic ones, indulge in such fancies; *mais nous avons changés tout cela.* If a husband were to challenge every individual that makes a declaration of love to his wife, all those who have good-looking ones would have nothing else to do. A sensible man

leaves the care of his honour to his wife; and if she be not silly or stupid, she will know how to prevent avowals that prove little for her tact or address. Montagu's declaration to you convinces me that you are miserably deficient in dignity and knowledge of the world; and that his discovery of these facts encouraged the step he has taken. It is fortunate, indeed, that I did not take you to London, for your *gaucherie* and ignorance of what is due to yourself and me, would have exposed us both to general animadversion and ridicule. What! tears again? Why, there is no speaking to you without your weeping. You are a perfect Niobe; and above all things, I dislike women who are ready to shed tears on every occasion. Red eyes and noses spoil any face; and unless you wish to become as hideous as the parson's wife, you should guard against them."

My poor mother passed some time before

she could check her tears, notwithstanding the counsel of her husband, and the risk of red eyes and nose.

The painfulness of her position increased daily, and the consciousness that she had entirely lost the affection of him to whom her heart would still fain cling, became yet more deeply impressed on her mind. "So fondly, too, as he once loved me!" murmured she. "What have I done to destroy a passion so warm?" Many an unhappy woman has asked herself the same question, when doomed to experience indifference or unkindness from him who for a brief period had made her the idol of his worship; and many more will continue to suffer in bitterness of heart, while they bestow their affections on men of libertine pursuits and selfish dispositions, who, ever incapable of pure or lasting attachments, only find interest in the chase of beauty, and satiety in the possession.

Although my mother had tried every

application to remove the trace of tears, her eyes still bore evidence to their recent presence: and far from having the delicacy to avoid noticing, or at least of betraying their notice of this circumstance, Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley exchanged significant glances of intelligence when they had remarked the alteration in the face of her whose youth and beauty so much excited their envy and dislike. Never had my mother appeared to such disadvantage as on that occasion. Her *amazone*, the fashion of five years gone by, was as unlike those of the two London ladies as possible; and her hat, totally dissimilar from theirs, exceedingly disfigured the fair face it shaded. There is something inexplicable in the power of fashion; and the homage offered to it is not confined solely to the gentler sex. Fickle as Fortune herself is acknowledged to be, Fashion, equally so, is nearly as blind, and so despotic as to compel the adoption

of her arbitrary laws without reference to their fitness, to her slaves, commanding the tall and short, the fat and thin, to follow the same mode, however unsuitable it may be to their appearance; nay, so universally are the decrees of this despot submitted to, that the few who dare assert their independence of her dictates are looked upon as being absurd and eccentric; and however fair and beautiful they may happen to be, attract ridicule instead of admiration.

Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley could not suppress the laughter which my mother's *outré* appearance called forth, although they made successful efforts to explain it by attributing it to some other source; my father's vanity was wounded at seeing his wife an object of ridicule, but instead of letting his displeasure fall on those who displayed such ill breeding, he reserved it all for her, and vented it in angry looks and whispered reproaches. The gentlemen

of the equestrian party were well disposed to overlook the obsoleteness of the *toilette* of my mother in the admiration excited by the lovely face and graceful figure which no dress could conceal nor unbecoming mode disfigure. Lord Algernon Montagu in particular fixed his eyes on her with such an expression of intense admiration as to embarrass and distress her when she became sensible that she entirely engrossed his attention. The worst horse in the stables of her husband was assigned to her; and, always a timid rider, she became still more alarmed in the course of a few minutes, when she discovered that her steed was not only addicted to stumbling, but was prone to start from one side of the road to the other on the least instigation. Each of the men, with the exception only of him who ought to have been the first, offered to exchange horses with my mother, while he expressed aloud, and in no courteous phrase,

his surprise at her alarm, which he insisted there was nothing to justify, as her horse was rather disposed to be sluggish than frisky.

A woman, however nervous, becomes less sensitive to fear when she observes that her safety is cared for, and, above all, by him she loves. His anxiety for her gives her courage by proving his tenderness; and with all the fond *abandon* peculiar to one beloved, she reposes her confidence in that tender watchfulness. But when the painful consciousness of neglect and unkindness is forced upon her, mental chagrin operates to increase personal apprehension; and she who finds herself uncared for by him on whom she counted, becomes a moral as well as a physical coward.

Such was the case with my mother. Every start or stumble of the animal she rode terrified her; and in proportion to her pusillanimity became the intrepidity of Lady Selina Mellingcourt and Mrs. Audley, and

consequently the ill humour of my father, who repeatedly and sarcastically demanded why she did not take example from those ladies, and not render herself ridiculous by her absurd fear. Lord Algernon Montagu kept close to her horse, requested to lead it, or to change her saddle to his own, and by gentleness and attention offered a striking contrast to the rudeness of her husband; but my mother, observing the glances of intelligence exchanged between the ladies, and the occasional sneer of my father, received Lord Algernon's assiduities so coldly as to discourage their continuance, although he still rode by her side. How forcibly and painfully did this ride remind her of those taken *tête-à-tête* with her husband during the brief days of happiness that followed their union; when, wholly engrossed by her, *he* was more easily alarmed for her safety than she, was. The very road they were now traversing had formerly been a favourite ride. Every turn of it recalled past ex-

pressions of tenderness—a tenderness then believed to be indestructible; but of which not a trace now remained, except in her memory, where it lived as if to render her sense of his present coldness and unkindness still more poignant.

Desirous to display her courage and horsemanship, Lady Selina Mellingcourt, *malgré* the counsel of my father, pushed her high-spirited steed into a gallop, when he, excited into ardour by the other horses, ran away, and was quickly out of sight. The rest of the party reined up their horses, lest a pursuit should only urge the speed of Lady Selina's; but my father boldly leaped his over a very high fence, and crossing a field as rapidly as possible, endeavoured to encounter Lady Selina, and arrest the flight of her horse.

"What a tremendous jump!" said Mr. Mellingcourt. "By Jove! I would not have taken it for a cool thousand!"

"You certainly would not, or, at least, did not, to save your wife!" observed Lord Henry Buttevant.

"Do not be alarmed, I entreat you!" said Lord Algernon Montagu, remarking the exceeding paleness of my mother's face, as she anxiously followed with her eyes the fast receding figure of her husband, who, urging his horse to his utmost speed, in the next moment disappeared in the direction which that of Lady Selina Mellingcourt had taken. A fearful presentiment of evil oppressed her, and the agitation it occasioned, far from being attributed to the true cause—anxiety for the safety of her husband, and alarm for Lady Selina Mellingcourt,—was imagined by the heartless people who surrounded her to proceed solely from feelings of jealousy, excited by the evident *dévouement* of my father to that lady.

Lord Henry Buttevant, who had ridden to a hill at a little distance, which com-

manded a view of the route taken by Lady Selina, was now seen galloping off in that direction. Lord Algernon Montagu proposed that Mr. Mellingcourt and Mr. Audley should proceed after him, to render any assistance that might be required, while he remained with the two ladies; but my mother insisted on accompanying them, and though so agitated as to be hardly able to retain her seat, she advanced rapidly towards the desired point, and soon saw a group on the road, among which she quickly discerned my father in safety. The revulsion in her feelings occasioned a burst of tears, which not all her efforts could subdue, and their traces were visible on her pale cheeks, as she approached the group, consisting of Lady Selina Mellingcourt, Lord Henry Buttevant, and my father. Lady Selina had not yet recovered from the effect of her recent alarm; and my father, reckless of what the observers might be dis-

posed to think of his conduct, was lavishing on her every attention that tenderness could dictate. He had neither eyes nor ears for his wife, who, shocked by this open display of his affection for her rival, felt a sickness at heart that occasioned a sudden faintness. Lord Algernon Montagu observed it in time to prevent her falling from her horse, and while he supported her in his arms, sent off Mr. Audley to a neighbouring cottage in search of a glass of water for her.

"In the name of wonder, what is the matter?" demanded my father, as his wife returned to consciousness.

"Mrs. Meredith was so alarmed for your safety," replied Lord Algernon Montagu, "that she was nearly falling from her horse."

"She alarmed herself very needlessly," was the answer. "But some women think it necessary never to miss an opportunity of making a scene."

"Talking of scenes," observed Mr. Mellingcourt, "Lady Selina is famous for them. Why, she has destroyed all the pleasure of our ride by her *escapade*. Not that *I* was the least alarmed, for I knew well enough there was nothing likely to happen to her. Nevertheless, it is a bore to see other people frightened."

"If Lady Selina had not the most perfect seat imaginable, and the finest hand in the world, she would inevitably have been thrown," said her admirer; "for, although I pushed my horse to his utmost speed, I only just reached the turn of the road in time to stop hers; and had he proceeded further, the velocity of his pace must have exhausted her!"

"Mr. Mellingcourt has so much presence of mind when others (and particularly his wife) are in danger, that he knows no fear!" remarked Lady Selina, with a sneer.

"It were to be wished that others were

equally free from nervousness," observed my father, looking angrily towards my mother; "for nothing is, in my opinion, so tiresome as the exhibition of groundless alarm."

CHAPTER XVI.

The party returned slowly from their ride, and found a new guest added to their circle in the person of Lord Thomas Mellicent, the son of an Irish marquis. The presence of this personage appeared to afford anything but satisfaction to the owner of the mansion, whose countenance assumed an expression of gloom the moment he beheld him. But not such was the effect produced on Lady Selina Mellingcourt, whose eyes sparkled with pleasure when she saw him.

"You are doubtlessly surprised at my

visit," said Lord Thomas, addressing my father; "but happening to hear that you were here, and passing within twenty miles, I determined to cross over, and accept your old invitation, in case I ever passed within reach of your house. *Ainsi me voilà.*"

His host did not appear to remember ever having given this asserted invitation, nor did he receive Lord Thomas with any degree of cordiality; but that gentleman was not disposed to notice the coldness of his reception. Determined to establish himself as a guest,—for a few hours, at all events, and for a few days, or weeks, if he could accomplish the point of obtaining an invitation for a protracted stay,—he was not scrupulous as to the measure of politeness accorded to him. Putting on, therefore, a certain free-and-easy air peculiar to him, he made himself perfectly at home for the time being. At dinner, he managed to secure a place next Lady Selina Melling-

court; and although their host was placed at the other side of that lady, Lord Thomas contrived to occupy so much of her attention, that she could hardly find time to answer the *petits soins* of him, to whom, during the previous days, all her amiability had been directed. The gallantries of Lord Thomas were as undisguised as they were particular, and implied that he felt pretty sure of their being acceptable to her to whom they were paid. And, truth to say, although Lady Selina Mellingcourt would have wished that they were less engrossing on the present occasion,—for she dreaded exciting the jealousy of her host,—she nevertheless was not sorry to find Lord Thomas Mellicent as gallant and devoted as when, a few months before, his attention had aroused the *amour propre*, if not the tenderness, of her other admirer.

Lord Thomas seemed to be on very friendly terms with Mr. Mellingcourt, who,

evidently gratified by witnessing the uneasiness which his presence occasioned to their host, was more than usually communicative towards him.

"I had a sort of presentiment that we should soon meet you, Mellicent," said he; "for when I saw a note directed to you the other day from Lady Selina, I guessed you would come."

Lady Selina blushed, and looked greatly embarrassed; while my father darted a glance of anger at her, that denoted no less surprise than indignation.

"What can you be thinking of, Mr. Mellingcourt," said Lady Selina, recovering a little from her embarrassment; "I certainly did not write to Lord Thomas Mellicent."

"What your motive for denying this fact can be I have yet to learn," replied Mr. Mellingcourt; "but that you *did* write admits not of a doubt; for perceiving a cover of yours addressed to your footman

in London, and having a little commission to give him, I opened the envelope to save postage, and saw a letter in your writing directed to Lord Thomas."

My father looked furious, Lady Selina deeply mortified, and Lord Thomas, triumphant, at this proof of the lady's preference, while Mr. Mellingcourt smiled maliciously as he remarked the evident discomfiture of his wife and his host. It was not unusual with this mean and unworthy man to avenge himself on his wife for any sarcasm or imagined slight on her part by discovering her secrets, and revealing them to the person she most wished should remain in ignorance of them; thus leaving the lover to punish the infidelities the husband had neither sufficient sense of morality nor honour to prevent or to avenge.

The whole party laboured under a visible constraint during the remainder of the evening. Lady Selina, fearful of arousing

to a still greater degree the but too evident displeasure of her host, refrained from giving the encouragement to the attentions of Lord Thomas Mellicent which it was plain he expected. Nevertheless, he took a seat by her, and so precluded her from having any explanation with her deeply-mortified and offended admirer, who, with frowning brows and compressed lips, sat watching her movements, while her contemptible husband remained in a corner, affecting to look over some prints, but really occupied in observing the annoyance of his wife and her admirers.

Cards were, as usual, introduced, but, contrary to the general custom, every one declined playing, under the plea of fatigue from their ride, and soon after twelve o'clock the party broke up and retired for the night.

In two hours afterwards, loud voices in the corridor awoke those who had sunk into

repose, and my mother, among the rest; having hastily enveloped herself in her *robe de chambre* and a shawl, she rushed towards the spot whence the sounds proceeded. There she found all the guests of the house assembled *en deshabille*, while her husband, Lord Thomas Mellicent, and Mr. Mellingcourt, were engaged in a violent altercation, which Lady Selina Mellingcourt was vainly endeavouring to subdue by uttering declarations of her perfect innocence in the whole affair.

"Innocent or not innocent," said her husband, "I require all present to testify that both these gentlemen," pointing to his host and to Lord Thomas Mellicent, "have been detected in Lady Selina's chamber; and ere long I shall have to summon you as witnesses to this fact before a court of justice."

No sooner did Lady Selina's *soi-disant* friend, Mrs. Audley, hear this sentence,

than she rapidly retreated, saying, "*O ciel, quelle idée!* To be brought before a court of justice; cross-examined by an odious man with a large wig! Really, Lady Selina Mellingcourt ought to have been more guarded in her conduct! *Fi donc!* To allow herself to be exposed in such a manner! It is too bad."

My mother retreated to her chamber, overpowered by the contending emotions of grief, shame, and terror, that filled her mind. Little prone as she was to judge harshly, however appearances might justify harsh judgment, the fact of two men meeting in the night in the chamber of Lady Selina, left no doubt that the conduct of that lady had been highly culpable; and that her own husband should have brought such a woman beneath the same roof with her was an outrage that shocked as much as it humiliated her. It was now, alas! but too evident to her that not only had she

lost his affection, but that he no longer entertained the least respect for her; or otherwise he never would have made her the associate of such a woman as Lady Selina Mellingcourt was now proved to be.

While she wept in bitterness of spirit, Lockly entered the room, exclaiming, "Ah! madam, all that I have heard during the last few days is but too true. Oh! what a wicked, wicked woman! I could hardly believe what her maid and the valets more than insinuated with regard to her conduct; but now there is no room to doubt. Mr. Mellingcourt has ordered his carriage to be got ready, and will not hear of her going with him, although, as her maid says, Lady Selina has been down on her knees to ask him. Ah! if he had taken more care to prevent his wife from doing wrong he need not now shew this severity! But it is always so; those who make no effort to protect the honour of their wives are the most

resentful when an exposure of their guilt occurs."

A knock at her dressing-room door, startled my mother, and Lockly having opened it, received a message from Mrs. Audley, requesting to see her mistress.

Soon afterwards Mrs. Audley made her appearance, and short as the time had been since she had been seen *en bonnet de nuit* and *robe de chambre*, she was now in a travelling dress, her shawl and bonnet already on.

"I could not depart, my dear Mrs. Meredith," said she, "without wishing you good bye, and thanking you for your kind hospitality." Observing the traces of tears and the agitation of her hostess, she resumed, "I cannot wonder that you feel this sad business severely. I, too, am profoundly touched, for I really liked this unhappy woman; and never imagined she was capable of the conduct that is now but too clearly proved.

I fear, however, that she is a very hardened person; for, would you believe it, she has had the impudence to ask me to let her go to London with me, as her husband has positively refused to allow her to travel with him, or to grant her the use of his carriage. After such an *exposé* as has just taken place, I could not on any account permit her to come with me; nay, I have thought it best to end all acquaintance with her at once, and so have declined any intercourse, directly or indirectly, with her for the future. Really one must not allow oneself to be mixed up in such disgraceful affairs; and, if I might take the liberty of offering you my advice, I would suggest the propriety of your sending her word that you require her to leave your house with as little delay as possible; for it will be very injurious to your reputation to have it known that after such a detection Lady

Selina Mellingcourt and you remained under the same roof an hour."

While Mrs. Audley was still speaking, the sound of carriage wheels driving up to the door of the mansion was heard, and a servant announced that Mr. Audley was ready to set out, and only waited for her.

"Adieu! my dear Mrs. Meredith," said she; "I hope we shall meet again somewhere or other. Do not let this sad affair grieve you too much. Remember the old song, '*On en revient toujours a ses premiers amours;*' and as Mr. Spencer Meredith was, I have heard, once extremely in love with you, he may yet return to his duty. Adieu!—adieu!" and seizing the cold and trembling hand of her hostess, she shook it, and quitted the room, leaving the latter confounded at her *nonchalance* and heartlessness.

CHAPTER XVII.

My mother remained for some time in deep thought. What was she, what ought she, to do? To order Lady Selina Mellingcourt to depart immediately, as Mrs. Audley advised, was a measure that she shrunk from; for though her feelings as a wife had been outraged, those of a woman, and a tender, pitying one, forbade this stern, though, probably, just proceeding. Nevertheless, for herself to leave the house, and thus forsake her erring husband, when her presence might be of use to him, would be acting

contrary to her sense of duty. And yet to see Lady Selina Mellingcourt, after what had occurred, would be most painful to her.

Lockly, who had quitted the chamber when Mrs. Audley entered it, now returned, and announced that Mr. Mellingcourt had departed.

"Would you credit it, madam," added she, "that wicked maid of Lady Selina's refused to dress her mistress, or to stay with her, now that her guilt has been made known; although there can be no doubt she was well acquainted with it for a long time—ay, and profited by it, too, for many and extravagant were the presents she received from Lady Selina, on whose conduct she, nevertheless, often passed many an indelicate joke in the steward's room. Well, bad as she is, I must say I pity her; a lady highly born and bred, to be insulted by her own servant, not because she has acted ill, for that she knew before, but

merely because the unhappy lady is exposed."

"And has Lady Selina no one to assist her?" asked my mother, her woman's heart prompting pity even for her unworthy rival. "Go to her, my good Lockly, and see that her comfort be attended to, until, as must soon be the case, she thinks fit to leave this house."

"Certainly, madam; as you desire it, I will go to Lady Selina Mellingcourt, although, if the truth must be told, I would rather——"

"Pray make no objections, my good Lockly, but oblige me by going at once."

Hardly had her *femme de chambre* departed, when the report of pistol-shots, one following quickly on the other, struck on my mother's terrified ear. She was seized with a violent fit of trembling, and a fearful presentiment of evil took possession of her mind. She attempted to move, with the intention of leaving the room, but she found

herself incapable of rising, until having poured out a little cold water, and swallowed it, she regained sufficient force to walk into the corridor. The first object that struck her was Lord Thomas Mellicent, hurrying along with rapid strides, and his countenance greatly agitated. He started when he saw my mother, and endeavoured to avoid her; but she in her terror seized his coat, and urged him to explain the cause of his apparent agitation, and whence had proceeded the shots she had heard.

"I must go this instant!" said Lord Thomas, gently disengaging himself from my mother's grasp. "My carriage waits. I have not a moment to lose."

Ere my mother could utter another word, Lady Selina Mellingcourt rushed from her chamber, and approaching Lord Thomas, said, "I guess all that has occurred. You are about to fly. For pity sake, take me with you!"

"It is impossible—quite impossible!" re-

plied Lord Thomas Mellicent. "Remember the consequences, the inevitable consequences, of such a step."

"You are thinking of their effect on *you*, not on *me*," said Lady Selina, reproachfully; "and had you the least portion of the love you have so often and so lately avowed for me—nay, had you a spark of compassion in your breast, you would not—you could not—abandon me, under present circumstances."

"You shall hear from me, indeed you shall, the moment I reach a place of safety," answered Lord Thomas Mellicent, and rushing from the presence of both ladies, he rapidly descended the stairs, leaving Lady Selina uttering angry reproaches, while my mother, trembling with emotion, stood leaning for support against a marble column. After a moment's pause, she addressed Lady Selina—"If you wish to quit this house," said she, "my carriage is at your service; and if you require money, my purse is at your command."

"But where, where am I to go?" demanded Lady Selina, bursting into a paroxysm of tears. "I have no home, no friend! My husband will not receive me: he has sworn that he will not, and I know his cold nature and unfeeling heart too well to doubt that he will adhere to his resolution. He who has just left us refused to let me be the partner of his flight, and deserts me at a crisis when I most stand in need of that affection he led me to believe he possessed for me."

"Go to your brother,—he will not cast you from him. Whatever may have been your errors, the tie of blood will plead for you in *his* heart. Go to him, and endeavour by your conduct for the future to atone for the past."

At this instant there was a noise in the hall, steps were heard ascending the stairs, voices urged the necessity of sending for a surgeon immediately, and a group approached, bearing my father, to all appear-

ance dead, with the breast of his shirt and his waistcoat stained by the ensanguined stream that was flowing from a wound in his chest. Lady Selina Mellingcourt rushed from the appalling sight, which had no sooner met his poor wife's eyes than she sunk, fainting, to the ground.

Scarcely need I mention that Lord Thomas Mellicent and my father had fought a duel, in which the latter was severely wounded.

When my mother was restored to a state of consciousness, she hurried to the chamber of her husband, in spite of the entreaties of those around her, and left not his side until the arrival of the surgeon. With her own hands she applied linen to stanch the wound, and bathed his burning brow with *eau d'Hongrie*. All her presence of mind and activity were restored to her in this trying moment; and when, in an hour after, she saw her husband open his languid eyes, and fix them on her with an expression of

kindness, to which she had long been a stranger, she pressed her lips on his brow, and a faint smile indicated that he was sensible of, and pleased at, this mark of affection.

The surgeon insisted on her leaving the room while he probed the wound, and endeavoured to extract the ball; but she remained at the door, breathless with terror, and her heart overflowing with pity, as she heard the groans occasionally wrung from her husband, by the torture he was undergoing. He fainted under the operation, and she believing, from the exclamation of his valet, that he was dead, rushed into the chamber, and would have thrown herself on the bed; but the surgeon having assured her that the insensibility of my father was but temporary, and that on resuming consciousness the sight of her alarm would be injurious to him, she mastered her feelings.

When he again opened his eyes, he found

her bending over his pillow with an expression of such pity and affection on her countenance, that he was evidently gratified and touched by it. It was found impossible to extract the ball, which was lodged in the chest, but the surgeon declared it had certainly not touched any vital part, and that if fever could be kept off, he hoped for the recovery of his patient. An express was sent to London to bring down one of the most eminent of the faculty there, and in the meanwhile my mother installed herself as nurse in the sick room, leaving it neither day nor night. But in all her alarm and agitation, she was not neglectful of Lady Selina Mellingcourt; for while my father slept, she ordered a carriage to be prepared for her, sent an upper housemaid and footman to attend her on the road, and inclosed banknotes to defray the expenses of the journey, adding a message, by Lockly, that sanguine

hopes were entertained by the surgeon of the recovery of Mr. Spencer Meredith.

Unfeeling as Lady Selina had hitherto proved herself to be, the forbearance and womanly pity which marked my mother's conduct towards her at this trying period, made a transitory impression on her mind, though it failed to open her eyes to the enormity of her past conduct. She did not adopt the advice given to her to place herself under the protection of her brother. Subsequently, however, her worthless husband, having discovered from the lawyer he consulted that his own culpable negligence in permitting her to receive the marked attention of my father and others, precluded him from legal redress, and that any attempt to obtain it would only draw odium on himself, he desisted from instituting proceedings, and was compelled to pay her a suitable allowance.

The skill of his surgeons, and the unceasing care and attention of my mother, were repaid, after some weeks, by the slow but gradual convalescence of my father; but Sir Antony Roper prepared both the patient and my mother not to expect that he would ever again be restored to the same robust health he had enjoyed previously to his wound. This admirable surgeon had discovered that the lungs of his patient had been injured by the bullet, which was lodged near them. My father was conscious of his own precarious state, and became from the date of this knowledge in every respect an altered man. Sensible of the value of the treasure he possessed in his wife, deeply did he deplore the folly and heartlessness of his past conduct towards her; and anxiously did he seek to expiate it, by the exercise of a patience in the endurance of pain, and a resignation to the probable result of his wound, little to be expected from his former

habits. He could hardly bear my mother to quit his sight; and lavished on her a thousand proofs of the tenderness that for years he had denied her. The love his indifference, and even unkindness, had failed to impair in her breast, was permitted, now that every exhibition of it afforded him the utmost gratification, to betray itself with all the warmth and devotion imaginable; and not even during the first halcyon days of happiness that followed their union, had his affection for her been so fervent as now, when, like a ministering angel, she bent over his pillow, watching every look, and anticipating every want. Who that could have beheld them in the seclusion of the sick chamber, their looks beaming with tenderness, and their words expressive of the deepest attachment, could have believed that, a few days before, the fond husband experienced only indifference for his wife, and lavished his affection on another. Nor

was it his danger alone that produced this revulsion in his feelings. No, it was the devotion, the unchanged love, of my mother, which in the hour of trial, when the companions of his pleasures and the partner of his guilt left him, clung to him, while, with all her woman's fondness, she breathed not a word that could remind him of the errors which he was now so cruelly expiating. He seemed to awake from a dream, and when looking on the beautiful face that bent over him with such an expression of unutterable love and pity, he wondered how he ever could have been insensible to its charms, and was ready to execrate his own blindness and folly for having preferred the worthless object that had alienated him from his admirable wife. I, too, became dear to him; and, seeing the tenderness he evinced towards my mother, soon grew familiar and affectionate with him. She was even more gratified with his caresses to me than with

the expressions of gratitude and unalterable love he was continually pouring out to her.

For a length of time, my father lingered in a state of great weakness, unable to bear the movement of a carriage, in order to try the efficacy of a change of air, recommended by his physician. Hope would sometimes whisper that years were yet in store for him, and he would believe the charmer; but, alas! the fiat had gone forth, and in four years after the fatal duel with Lord Thomas Mellicent, he breathed his last, in the arms of his wife.

Sincere and heartfelt had been his repentance during the time that had been allowed him to prepare for death; and humbly and thankfully had he accepted the promises held out by the religion that cheered him to the last by the hopes it inspired. He died uttering blessings on his heart-broken wife, and urging her to live for my sake. Thus,

if his life had been marked by errors, his death-bed offered an example edifying to all who witnessed his resignation and devotion during the last years.

CHAPTER XVIII.

For a long time the physicians entertained but little hope of my mother's ever recovering from the injury her health had sustained by her grief for my father. Her constitution, never a strong one, was so much weakened by the fatigue and anxiety occasioned by his long illness, that it was unable to bear up against the grief that oppressed her; and during the remainder of her life she continued to be a valetudinarian, generally confined to her sofa, and obliged to be lifted in and out of the carriage to

take the air. She could not bear me from her sight, consequently I was not permitted to be sent to a public school. A preceptor was found for me, and under his tuition I made a progress that fully satisfied the expectations of my doting mother. My father, whose fortune was not entailed, bequeathed the whole of it to his widow for her life, with reversion to me at her death.

This great wealth had perhaps some influence, although her singular personal beauty alone might have accomplished it, in attracting suitors to my mother, many of whom, and Lord Algernon Montagu among the number, had, after her year of mourning had expired, addressed proposals of marriage to her. Her acquaintance with these interested admirers had been much too slight to warrant the step they had taken; but as she lived in a state of total seclusion, refusing to receive visitors, they had recourse to this measure, of the success of

which, no one who knew her could have entertained a hope.

At fifteen years old, my preceptor was changed for one calculated to forward my studies, and, encouraged by my mother's commendations, I applied myself diligently to work with him. Unbroken in upon by the fellowship of other youths, and uncontaminated by their example, my mind remained as pure as that of a girl, at an age when, by evil communication, most boys have lost their innocence. Those were happy days! And now that many years have since elapsed, I look back to them as the green oasis in the desert of a troubled life, and grieve that I valued them not sufficiently. The first interruption to my happiness was occasioned by the illness of my mother. So gradual had been its slow and insidious progress, that the growing paleness of her cheek, and increasing languor of her frame, alarmed me not, until

I one day remarked the grave aspect of her physician as he left her chamber, and saw the portentous shake of the head he gave when questioned by my preceptor relative to his patient. I hurried to her dressing-room, and clasping her in my arms, could not repress the tears that rushed to my eyes, as the apprehension of her danger first made my heart thrill with agony. She also wept, as she but too well divined the cause of my tears; and the fond mother overcame, for a brief time, the resigned Christian in her heart.

"Yes, I must soon leave you, my dear son!" said she, as soon as the rising sobs, which for some minutes impeded speech, allowed her utterance.

"Oh! do not say so, mother—dearest, dearest mother! I will not, cannot, lose you!" sobbed I.

"You, like me, my own Henry, must learn resignation to the Divine will; and

this hard lesson will be best acquired by laying a foundation for indulging the blessed hope that our separation, though bitter, will not be eternal. Without *this* hope, I could not contemplate our parting as a Christian woman ought; and you, my son, will strengthen it by promising me so to live, that in another, a better world, we shall be re-united!"

I think I see her now, with that pale, yet still beautiful face, shaded by the delicate lace borders of her cap, her shadowy form enveloped in the folds of a white wrapping-dress, and her transparent hands fondly pressing mine, as her dark and lustrous eyes beamed on me with unutterable fondness. Convinced that her days were numbered,—and oh! what bitter sorrow did that conviction inflict on my heart! —I could not for a moment banish the fearful thought from my mind. I would gaze on her for hours, as if to imprint every

lineament of that fair and still beauteous countenance on my memory; listen to every sound of that low, musical voice, until tears would spring to my eyes at the thought that it would soon be stilled in the silence of the grave; and then rush from her chamber, to indulge in those bursts of passionate grief that her presence checked. Every reference to the future—that future she was not to share—excited my feelings to agony, and I resented such from others with anger. When the gardener, in my presence, proposed the erection of a new green-house, to increase the stock of plants and flowers for the next year, I angrily turned from him, and concealed myself in the thickest shades of the shrubbery, to think of *where* she, who so loved plants and flowers, would be sleeping when his plan was carried into execution; and I breathed a wish that I, and all around, might finish with her existence!

One day, when the housekeeper waited on my mother for orders, and asked whether she should increase the usual stock of preserves then about to be made, especially a peculiar one, to which her mistress had been partial, I noticed my mother's cheek grow paler as she faintly answered, "No, my good Atkinson, you need not prepare that, but let there be a large provision of raspberry jam and apricots, for my son likes them."

These things may seem trivial, and not worth the trouble of noting; but they had a deep effect on me. The consciousness of her own approaching end, and the forethought for even my epicurean fancies, when she should be no longer on earth, made a sickness of heart steal over me, the cause of which, I believe, she guessed, for I found her eyes fixed on me with such an expression of unutterable tenderness, that tears started to mine. I could hardly bear to

leave her presence, even to take the air and exercise which she insisted on my daily doing. In my dreams I would start up, fearful that she might pass away whilst I slept; and I would steal to her chamber to satisfy myself that she still lived.

Summer passed away, and autumn had now far advanced, when the increasing debility of my mother warned us that all must soon be over. She was perfectly conscious of her approaching dissolution, and so resigned to it, that I, selfish and thoughtless as I was, felt almost jealous that *she* could contemplate our separation with such calmness, while my heart was torn with anguish at the thought. Seated by her bedside, anxiously watching every change of her pale face, she beckoned me to draw still nearer to her.

"This may be the last time I can speak to you, my son!" said she, "for I am about to leave you. Remember that my deathbed

was cheered by that religion which supported me through the trials of my youth, and which has enabled me to bear the ill health with which it has pleased the Almighty to afflict me. I am sustained by the blessed hope of being united to my husband, and of welcoming you, my dear son, when it shall please God to summon you from this world to that better, brighter scene, where there are no more partings. Bless you, bless you, my son. Let me be laid by the side of your father. I can no longer see you; let me hear your voice once more. Bless—bless!"

Her eyes closed—she gave a faint moan, and all was over.

I could not believe that she was indeed gone for ever. I pressed my lips to her cold ones; I held her in a convulsive grasp to my heart, but the rigidity of her attenuated frame soon forced on me the conviction that life was indeed extinct. In a violent burst of passionate sorrow, I threw my-

self by her side, and seizing her hand—that hand which had so often and fondly grasped mine, I wept in uncontrollable anguish, until, exhausted, I fell into a state of insensibility.

CHAPTER XIX.

"He must be removed from the body," were the first words I heard, when, with returning consciousness, I became sensible of what was passing around me. "*The body!*" how those two words shocked me! And it was thus they named that which, but a few minutes before, had contained the ethereal spark—had been instinct with life, with thought, and with affection. The pale lips, now closed in the rigidity of death, had but lately spoken words of love to me; the eyes, now shut for ever, had beamed with tender-

ness on me; the accents, still fresh in my ear, I should never more hear on earth; and the hands that had so often clasped mine lay white, and cold as marble to my touch! Yes, it was plain that which was before me was but a body—a lifeless, inanimate body—insensible alike to my anguish or to my love. Nevertheless, I could not bear to hear it so called; and affection so vanquished the natural horror with which death inspires the young, that I could hardly be persuaded to leave all that now remained of that dear mother on whom I had so fondly doted, nor that other eyes than mine should behold her pale corse.

Her faithful attendant Lockly promised me that no other hand than hers should perform the last offices for her departed mistress, and that when they were fulfilled, I should again be admitted to her chamber. Pacified by this promise, I retired to my own room; and having thrown myself on my

bed, I wept, until, in a deep slumber, I lost the consciousness of the dreary, cheerless present. In dreams, the past was restored to me; my mother was again by my side, not as I had for many weeks been accustomed to see her, but as in former times I remembered her—blooming and beautiful. Her eyes beamed on me with affection, her red lips opened to speak words of love, and her accents sounded musically as ever in my ears. She gently chided me for believing that she could leave me, and I in a transport of joy threw my arms around her neck; when my preceptor awoke me by taking off my clothes, and administering a calming medicine which the family physician had thought it advisable should be taken.

How fearful is the first awaking after some heavy affliction! The sense of it coming afresh to the mind, and with renewed bitterness, while the frame, recruited by slumber, renders the feelings more acutely

sensible of their tortures than when, exhausted by the first shock, the mind and body had sunk beneath its weight! I took the offered opiate, allowed myself to be undressed, and fell into a heavy slumber, from which I did not awake until a late hour the next day. A bright sun was shining through my windows, and a blue and cloudless sky was mirrored in the calm lake in front of them. Myriads of birds were sending forth their joyous notes from the umbrageous trees and shrubberies in the vicinity of the house, and all nature looked bright and beautiful. I turned from the sight in disgust and anger; for so deep was the gloom within my breast, that I could not support the external gaiety that reigned around, while she who so loved to contemplate all that I now turned from was sleeping in death, and could never more behold the beautiful scenery before me. I should have liked to have seen the sun clouded, the land-

scape shaded in gloom, and nature as sad and cold as my own breast; but this contrast revolted me, and I hastily pulled down the blinds, that I might not behold it. I experienced a sense of shame when the pangs of hunger made themselves felt, after nearly twenty-four hours of abstinence from food. What! in grief such as mine could I wish to eat, and could the wants of the body thus triumph over the agony of the mind? I almost hated myself as I partook of the food placed before me at the repast that had always hitherto been partaken with my mother; and when it was concluded, I repaired to her chamber.

The worthy Lockly had performed the last sad duties of her office to the dear departed. The pale, but still beautiful face, with the dark silken tresses, *à la Madonna*, was shaded by a nightcap, the delicate lace borders of which were less white than that cold still face, on the cheeks of which the

jetty eyelashes rested. The features, so finely chiselled, looked like those of some exquisite marble statue, and the mouth seemed still to wear the sweet smile which had so often delighted me.

"Oh! could I but retain for ever that lovely image, even as it now is," said I, "I should not feel so lone and desolate," and a plenteous flood of tears poured from my eyes. I motioned to Lockly to leave the room, which she, after a few unavailing efforts at consolation, consented to do, and I, having bolted the door to preclude interruption, threw myself on my knees, and pressed my lips to the cold ones of my mother. I addressed her by the most endearing epithets, implored her not to forget, in the pure regions she was called to, the son she left alone on earth to deplore her loss, and to live on her memory. I watched that calm, still face, and was almost disappointed that it relaxed not its rigid expres-

sion; while I, my voice half-choked by deep emotion, poured forth the anguish of my heart. It is terrible to be alone with the loved and lately dead, when so much of the semblance of life remains as to half cheat one into the hope that the intensity of grief experienced may be known by its object, and that we are not yet wholly and for ever sundered. But when the voice, once so fondly listened to, makes no impression on the cold still ear of death—when tears, burning tears, fall unheeded on the marble cheeks, and the icy lips return no pressure —then is it that we feel the bitterness of grief renewed, in the crushing consciousness of the total separation between the living and the dead—then is it that the pale image of the object so fondly loved in life, so like, yet so unlike, but increases the poignancy of sorrow; and one turns from it with agony to weep, yet soon returns to gaze again, jealous of losing one of the few

hours still left, ere the envious grave shall hide it for ever from our sight.

Moments passed under such circumstances add the gravity of years of experience to life, and I left the chamber of death as if ten had been added to my age. I thought that I now had experienced all the bitterness of grief, but the succeeding day, when that face, so lately pure, and fair as Parian marble, assumed an ashy hue, and the features began to lose something of their symmetrical beauty, a feeling of dread and horror became mingled with my sorrow. Every hour rapidly changed the countenance, until, unable any longer to contemplate it without terror, I made no further objection to the lid of the coffin being fastened down, although every blow of the hammer seemed to strike at my heart; and, in order to restrain myself from interfering to prevent their continuance, I was obliged to remember that *she* who was inclosed in that coffin

was wholly insensible to the sounds that produced such torture to my feelings. And now, when she was hidden for ever from my view, and that black box was all that remained, how did I accuse myself for having consented to its being closed, when I might for another day have contemplated the face which, however changed, was still dearer to my heart than all on earth beside. How many bitter burning tears fell on the coffin, as, seated by it, my aching head reposed on its edge. All around the chamber was still and silent as the grave. The servants moved with stealthy steps in the house, as if afraid to break the death-sleep of the mistress they had so fondly loved; or perhaps actuated by a sentiment of respectful pity for the grief of the orphan. Nought save the carolling of birds was to be heard, and their music sounded sadly to my ears, while the bitter consciousness that *hers* who used to enjoy

the melody were sealed in death, filled my heart with anguish.

How many times, during the nights that intervened before the funeral, did I awake from troubled dreams, and start from my couch, when, remembering that the corse of my mother still rested beneath the same roof with me, I used to hurry to her chamber, and press my lips again and again on the coffin that contained all that remained of that beautiful and gentle being. But too soon did the hour arrive, when even this melancholy consolation was to be denied me. The day of interment was come, and I was not only to witness the removal of my dead mother from the home which her love and care for me had rendered so happy a one, but I was to follow her remains to the tomb. Well do I remember the agony of that hour, and the efforts I made to bear up against the overpowering anguish of my feelings

during the affecting burial ceremony, the voice of the good pastor who pronounced the ritual, trembling with emotion as he read it, until, when the coffin was lowered into the vault, and the first shovel of earth was thrown on it, I lost all consciousness, and did not revive until two hours after.

CHAPTER XX.

It was during convalescence, after a long illness that followed, that the good Lockly, who seldom left my bedside, and was somewhat given to gossip, confided to me the errors of my father, and the trials to which my dear mother had been subjected. The memory of my father was not spared by her; for, fondly attached to my mother from her infancy, she was less disposed to pardon or forget the wrongs of her mistress, than was that gentle mistress herself.

"I fear, sir, that I am wrong," would

Lockly say, "in relating to you the bad conduct of your father; but the person I loved the most on earth—and such a person, too—suffered so severely from it, that the relation may prove a warning to you, sir, and prevent your being, as he was, the cause of misery to some worthy lady."

There were moments during the narrative when my anger and indignation were so much excited against my father, that my cheeks burned and my eyes sparkled, and I was obliged to recall to memory the last years of his life, when his penitence and tenderness for my mother and myself were so marked, ere I could think of him with that sentiment of respect which a son ought to entertain for a dead parent. The particulars narrated to me by the garrulous Lockly became so amalgamated in my mind with those remembered in my childhood, that it seemed to me as if I had witnessed all, and even now, so vivid is the

recollection, that it appears as if only months instead of long long years had elapsed since they occurred.

My health had suffered so severely from the effect of grief at my poor mother's death, that the physicians consulted on the occasion deemed it expedient that I should be removed to a milder climate. My guardian, Lord Lymington, the only male relative of my mother, and to whom she had written when all hope of recovery had been given up, to entreat his acceptance of the trust she meant to confide to him, came down a few months after her decease, indisposition being his alleged excuse for not having sooner taken any interest in his orphan ward.

Lord Lymington was then about fifty years old, still remarkably good-looking, being *bien conservé*, and with pretensions to appear still a young man. Possessed of great wealth, he had unfortunately devoted this advantage solely to his own personal

gratification, and seldom bestowed a thought on aught that did not directly interfere with the cherished idol of his worship—self. Although often tempted to put on the chains of wedlock, he had never assumed them, being, as it was said, in his youth, always prevented by the dread that as man and wife are considered to become one, his identity might be confounded with that of what a wife is styled—*his better half*, and that his comfort, or even a single portion of it, might be compromised. He had therefore, although fond of female society, continued a bachelor, and applauded his own sagacity in forming and in hitherto adhering to a resolution that precluded him from many of the annoyances to which his contemporaries who had become Benedicts were exposed. The whole stock of affection generally implanted in the human heart to be called into action by its fellow-beings, was entirely bestowed by Lord Lymington

on self, and it may be doubted whether all the ties of nature formed by man in the relative positions of son, husband, father, brother, and friend, ever exceeded, if they equalled, the sum expended by this individual on himself. This undue expenditure brought with it its own punishment, for the whole powers of his mind being directed to but one focus—the study to avoid suffering any of the bodily or mental ills to which all of poor human kind are subject, not unfrequently occasioned even greater annoyances than those he sought to evade. Lord Lymington had read that "the proper study of mankind is man," and mistaking the true sense of the philosophic poet who wrote the line, applied that which was meant for mankind generally to his own individual case. So bland were his manners, and so even seemed his temper, that he was, on a first acquaintance, sure to captivate the good will of those with whom he came in contact.

Nor did they discover how much too favourably they had judged him, until, on a greater intimacy, encouraged by his urbanity, they ventured to appeal to his sympathy when labouring under some of the trials from which none are exempt. Too quickly then they found that he listened to the relation of their afflictions with an indifference which not even his habitual good breeding could conceal; and that he ever after carefully avoided their society.

He had lately been suffering from a slight indisposition, which his egotistical fears had magnified into a serious one; and when he arrived at Meredith Park, was accompanied by his physician, who had lately advised his lordship to pass the ensuing winter in a warm climate. My pallid face alarmed my guardian, not for me but for himself, as he dreaded the trouble my bad health might impose on him, or the danger to which a contact with me might expose him.

"Good God! Porson, his hand is burning hot!" said Lord Lymington, as he quickly withdrew his own from the friendly pressure with which he had seized mine. "Feel his pulse, Porson!" resumed his lordship; and he looked so anxiously in my face that I felt disposed to like him, believing, with all the credulity peculiar to youth, that a warm interest for me occasioned the anxiety I witnessed.

"A winter in a mild climate would be very advantageous to this young gentleman, my lord," said Doctor Porson, "and it happens very opportunely that your lordship is about to try the same remedy."

"I see what you mean, Porson, but it is not to be thought of — quite out of the question, Porson;" and he glanced significantly at the doctor, to prevent him saying anything more on the subject.

After looking out on the pleasure grounds and park for a few minutes, he suddenly

remarked that he feared Meredith Park was a very unhealthy place.

The vivid green of the lawn, he said, indicated damp, and my pale face spoke little, as he was pleased to say, in favour of the air. "The father and mother, too, died here!" continued Lord Lymington, in a voice meant to be a whisper, but which was perfectly intelligible to me; nevertheless, I still attributed his evident uneasiness to anxiety for me. "I don't feel quite well, Porson," said Lord Lymington, after a few minutes.

"Indeed! my lord; what, pray, are your lordship's symptoms?"

"A sort of languor, a sense of fatigue and exhaustion. How is my pulse?"

Doctor Porson's large gold repeater, with its massive chain and seals, was now drawn forth; the sleeve of Lord Lymington's coat was carefully turned up; and, after counting the beats of the pulse for a few seconds, the sapient doctor pronounced that a

luncheon and glass of old sherry were all that was required to restore his lordship to his usual state. The luncheon was ordered, and many injunctions given that "the *côtelettes à la minute* should be particularly tender;" "and suppose," added Lord Lymington, "that while they are being prepared, you mix a camphor julep for me." The doctor assured his lordship that his digestion would be impaired by his taking any medicine before eating, but the *malade imaginaire* declared the necessity of his having something to invigorate his stomach previously to essaying its powers on the mutton *côtelettes*, so the Doctor went in search of the medicine chest, without which Lord Lymington never took even the shortest journey. "Be sure to bring down the thermometer," added the peer, "in order that there may be no mistake about the temperature of the room I am to sit in. You had better also prepare a digestive

pill, lest I may suffer from the tough meat one is always sure to encounter in the country."

My preceptor now waited on my guardian, who received him very graciously. He examined his countenance attentively, and it was evident that the result was satisfactory. When Mr. Rivers was expecting to be questioned respecting the progress of his pupil, he looked somewhat surprised to be asked whether he thought it likely that tender mutton-cutlets could be had for luncheon.

"I have not the least doubt, my lord," was the pleasing answer, "for I am very particular with regard to tender meat."

"Indeed!" said Lord Lymington; "I am very glad to hear it."

"The mutton here is of a peculiarly fine flavour, as is also the beef, as we have an excellent breed of small Scots bullocks, and I venture to pronounce that your lordship

will be pleased with both," continued my tutor.

"Is this a healthy place, Mr. Rivers?"

"Remarkably so, my lord; the soil is gravelly, the air pure and mild, and the temperature equal."

"Yet the recent deaths in the family, and the delicate appearance of your pupil, might induce me to draw a different conclusion, Mr. Rivers."

"The air of Meredith Park had nothing to do in the affliction to which your lordship refers; and the delicate appearance of my pupil arises from his only recent recovery from a very serious illness, occasioned by the severe trial to which he has been exposed."

"Nothing grave, nothing hereditary—eh?"

"Nothing, my lord."

"But do you not think, Mr. Rivers, that the undue sensibility that must have existed

to account for the illness occasioned by the trial to which you referred is indicative of a weak constitution? Sensibility is destructive to health; no constitution can resist the inroads it makes. It is in itself a malady, and one of the worst, and people should be taught to conquer it as early as possible. I should not now be alive, had I not vanquished mine, which I did at a very early age, a precocious firmness of mind and an unusual clear-sightedness having enabled me to discover how injurious such weakness might prove to my own happiness."

Mr. Rivers bowed, and remained silent, and Dr. Porson administered his camphor julep to Lord Lymington.

"So you think," resumed his lordship, "that your pupil is not consumptive!"

"I am persuaded he is not, my lord."

"Is he naturally of a lively, cheerful temper?"

"I considered him peculiarly so, my lord, before the recent afflictions."

"Well, if I could be quite sure that he would soon recover his health and spirits, I should be disposed to take him with me to the Continent."

"Nothing would, I am of opinion, be so conducive to the recovery of his spirits as change of scene, for here, my lord, where everything reminds him of his mother, his grief is kept fresh in his mind."

"Do not mention my plan, Mr. Rivers, until I have finally decided on the measure. It requires mature consideration, for should his recovery be slow, *I* should be subjected to the annoyance—and a very serious one it would be—of seeing before me a pale face and dejected countenance, of hearing sighs, or of having bodily suffering forced on my attention. Charity, the old proverb says, begins at home; and I assure you, it would be aught but charitable towards myself to entail any such annoyances on me."

Here a servant announced that luncheon was served; and Lord Lymington proceeded to the dining-room, inviting Mr. Rivers to partake of it.

"Sensible man, Porson, very sensible man," whispered the Peer to his physician.

"Does your lordship think so?" was the only remark made by the Doctor, who, fearful of seeing a rival for his patron's favour start up in every person thrown in his way, was cautious of encouraging any partiality towards Mr. Rivers.

"Capital *côtelettes*, Mr. Rivers; tender and juicy."

"I am glad your lordship likes them; and I think I can assure your getting some excellent sherry, or claret, if you prefer it."

"Famous sherry!" said the Peer, smacking his lips, "and, by Jove! just what I could have wished—another hot *côtelette*."

"I thought, my lord, that sent up hot and hot, the *côtelettes* might tempt your lordship."

"And you thought like a sensible man, Mr. Rivers. But you do not eat; you are not abstemious, I hope,—eh?"

"I am afraid of spoiling my appetite for dinner, my lord, and had partaken of some roast chicken with my pupil only just before your lordship arrived."

"Right, Mr. Rivers; never spoil your appetite for dinner. Nothing denotes such a want of taste, as well as a want of good breeding, as people sitting down to dinner with spoiled appetites. I make it a point never to invite people a second time, who are so unmindful of the comfort of others, unless, indeed, they happen to be retailers, or better still, makers of *bon mots*, in which case I approve their *prévoyance* in having taken off the keen edge of their appetites, in order not to interrupt the telling their good stories."

"Perhaps your lordship had better not venture on another glass of that sherry,"

said Dr. Porson, with a deprecatory look, as he saw the Peer in the act of pouring out a second glass of sherry.

"Phoo, stuff and nonsense!" replied the Peer, raising the glass to his lips, and imbibing its contents with evident satisfaction.

"Why, you have drank *three* glasses of wine, Porson, yet you object to my having two, and I see you have eaten four *côtelettes* to my two."

"My constitution, my lord, requires more stimulants than your lordship's."

"So you always say; and if the stimulants made you any merrier or more amusing, I should not object to your habits of self-indulgence."

The Doctor's face grew red with anger, but his prudence checked the exhibition of any symptom of displeasure; as he civilly observed, that his profession was too grave to admit of its followers giving way to the levity calculated to amuse their patients.

"Suppose we take a walk, Mr. Rivers," said Lord Lymington. "It will assist my digestion. Ring for Dunington, Doctor, that he may bring my clogs and great coat."

"I hope your lordship will not forget to tie your Cashmere scarf around your throat, for the air is somewhat damp, and let me recommend you not to walk fast, lest it might impede the process of digestion, and disturb the action of the gastric juices; let me also suggest the propriety of postponing the dinner-hour until eight, instead of seven o'clock, that your appetite may have time to recover."

CHAPTER XXI.

"And so the poultry and mutton are remarkably good here, Mr. Rivers, eh?"

"Excellent, my lord."

"And the air?" said Lord Lymington.

"As I before had the honour of observing to your lordship, is peculiarly mild and equal," replied Mr. Rivers.

"Then, by Jove! I shall make up my mind to remain here a few days, get better acquainted with my ward, and by so doing, be able to form a judgment whether or not his accompanying me to the Continent would

be conducive to my comfort. You have travelled, I presume, Mr. Rivers?"

"Yes, my lord, I made the tour of France, Spain, and Italy, with Lord Medlicott."

"Indeed! He is a very sensible young man. A monstrous good judge of eating. Keeps the best cook, and gives the most *recherchés* dinners in London. Medlicott has acquired no little consideration, I assure you, Mr. Rivers, by his good taste in eating. Did you direct that as well as his education?"

"I endeavoured to do so, my lord. When I first became acquainted with his lordship, I found his education had been sadly neglected, and his taste in the pleasures of the table wholly uncultivated. I considered it to be my duty to instruct Lord Medlicott to the utmost of my power; and during our extended tour, I sought, while pointing out the objects connected with classical or historical lore most worthy of attention, to draw his notice also to the delicacies peculiar

to each country. If I did not find his lordship so apt a scholar as could be wished in the attainment of learning, I had no reason to complain of his progress in gastronomy. Ere we had completed our tour, his palate was so exercised in the dainties and culinary art of the countries we travelled through, that he could detect the least failure in the qualities or modes of preparing the dishes ordered; hence his knowledge on these points gave him a superiority over those with whom his want of intellectual cultivation would have reduced him to an equality, while with persons of superior intelligence and attainments (for all such like good eating) it redeemed him from contempt."

"You could not have done better, Mr. Rivers. You reasoned like a sensible man, and the proof of the success of your system is, that nothing short of a command from royalty would induce any of Medlicott's *convives* to break a dinner engagement

with him, so highly appreciated is his *savoir vivre* and skill in gastronomy. You would not, perhaps, object to accompany my ward to Italy?" said Lord Lymington, after a few minutes' pause.

"Certainly not, my lord; more especially if my pupil was to have the honour of travelling in the suite of his noble guardian."

"Then, by Jove! it shall be so, Mr. Rivers, and I will install you in the office of caterer for my table during our travels. You shall be the Amphytrion in all save the expense of our dinners; and should you be as extravagant as Lucullus himself, I shall not object to it."

Thus encouraged, my preceptor launched forth into an animated monologue on *plats recherchés*, and an elaborate description of the qualities of the various viands to be used in their concoction, the erudition of which would not have disgraced Apicius himself. During his dissertation, he dis-

played a knowledge of the classical epicureanism of the ancients, and the most approved inventions of the moderns, which so captivated Lord Lymington, that on entering the house, after a long walk, he declared, to the no slight displeasure of the jealous-minded Doctor Porson, that he was delighted at having found so agreeable a fellow-traveller as Mr. Rivers, for the sake of whose society he was willing to be encumbered with his ward.

"Such a perfect knowledge of cookery, and so refined a taste, I have rarely met united," said my guardian.

"May it not be feared, my lord, that Mr. Rivers's acquirements in gastronomy may lead your lordship to transgress the rules I have found it requisite to lay down for the preservation of your lordship's health."

"Health! health!" said Lord Lymington. "I hear of nothing but health! I

wish I could feel instead of only hearing of this blessing."

"Permit me to observe, my lord," answered Doctor Porson, "that I do not think, everything considered, your lordship has any reason to complain either of my want of skill or attention, or the result."

"Why, by Jove! I know not that I can boast of any extraordinary health, my good Doctor. I am told that I must not eat this, nor touch that; and these prohibitions extend to precisely the only things I like to eat. Then the few, the very few delicacies of which I am permitted to partake, I have hardly tasted, before I am reminded that I am exceeding the bounds allowed. All pleasure of my repasts is destroyed, when I see you looking like a *memento mori* at every morsel I touch, and at every glass of wine I drink. Now, whether I am to die of repletion or starvation seems to be the question; and as I prefer good

dinners to bad ones, I expect that when I sacrifice so much to your system of *régime*, I ought at least to have the benefit of it."

"But, my lord, is there a day that your lordship does not transgress the bounds of prudence by indulging your appetite?"

"If I did not, Doctor Porson, I should have no occasion for your services. I thought your skill might enable me to feast with impunity, by providing antidotes for the bane of good dishes; but if I am only to be cured by starvation, I see no use in a physician."

"There is surely a great difference, my lord, in the avoidance of the most exciting cookery, and starvation! I have always allowed sufficient food, and only prohibited that which is improper."

"But if I can only eat that which you call improper——"

"Your lordship must excuse me if I say,

that I have seen no deficiency in your lordship's appetite."

"So *you* say; but what is it in comparison to your own, Doctor? Why, you eat more at one repast than I do at four. You preach abstinence, it is true, but you are far from practising it."

"The quantity and quality of food which a person in perfect health may partake of with impunity, would be extremely dangerous for an invalid, my lord."

"You are, I suppose, the person in perfect health, and I am the invalid, Doctor?—a proof that your treatment of self succeeds better than your theoretical management of your unfortunate patients."

"Allow me, my lord——"

"I *will not* allow you to continue this tiresome discussion, Doctor. I hate arguments, and am sure they do not tend to aid the process of digestion."

"Many persons, my lord, are of a contrary opinion; for the effect produced on the gastric juices by——"

"Spare me, spare me, for mercy sake, Doctor! For if you once get on the gastric juices, mine will inevitably turn to bile—so tired am I of hearing of them."

The doctor looked and felt sulky, and from that moment indulged a dislike towards my preceptor, for having been the cause, although an innocent one, of his discussion with his patient. To prevent my accompanying my guardian to the Continent, and consequently to separate Lord Lymington from his new favourite, Mr. Rivers, now became the object of his thoughts. The first scheme to accomplish this which suggested itself to the Doctor, was to persuade my guardian that he had discovered certain symptoms in me which would render a sojourn on the Continent injurious to my health. In thinking that this reason would

have any influence on one so wholly selfish as Lord Lymington, except inasmuch as the presence of an unhealthy young man might impede his own personal comfort, proved that the Doctor was not as well acquainted with the sentiments and feelings of his patient as might be expected, from the length of time which he had been domiciled with him. The first attempt to convince Lord Lymington that my safety would be endangered by going to Italy, only drew from him a declaration that, however that might be, he could not abandon his project of securing the attendance of Mr. Rivers, whose knowledge in gastronomy, and pleasing manners, rendered his society so peculiarly agreeable to him.

"I don't want to take the young man with me," said Lord Lymington; "but, by Jove! I will, rather than lose such a travelling companion as Rivers, offer him a much larger salary than he gets for being pre-

ceptor to my ward, and which doubtless he will accept!"

When Doctor Porson discovered that his scheme for separating Lord Lymington from his new favourite would be as much defeated by my being left behind as if I went, and still more so, as in the present *engouement* of the Peer for Mr. Rivers, he would be very likely to make a permanent engagement with him, he determined to change his tactics, and encourage my being taken to the Continent.

With so capricious a man as Lord Lymington is, thought Porson, the chances are that he will soon grow as tired of the society of Rivers as he has done of mine; for I, too, in the commencement, was a favourite. And then, being merely the preceptor of his ward, the Peer will not be saddled with him, and can without embarrassment bow him out when it suits his lordship's fancy, as he has done other favourites before. If, how-

ever, he engages Rivers as a travelling companion for himself, there would be an awkwardness, as well as some difficulty, in getting rid of him—so it is better to have the young man of the party."

Thus reasoned the sapient Doctor Porson; and in accordance with this reasoning he said all in his power to promote his recent plan of my accompanying my guardian, in defiance of the sneering remarks made by the Peer on his sudden change of opinion on this point. Among the many failings of Lord Lymington, suspicion was one of the most prominent. This mean sentiment led him to analyze the motives that actuated every one about him, and incapable of appreciating goodness or disinterestedness,—for he had no sympathy with either,—he was prone—drawing his knowledge from self—to attribute the most interested and vulgar motives, when not unfrequently kind ones only existed. With regard to those of

Doctor Porson, however, he was not far wrong; and he gloried in his own sagacity in detecting them—a sagacity for which he was solely indebted to the similarity in selfishness which existed between that person and himself.

"Hah! hah!" said the Peer to himself, as he marked the tergiversation in the Doctor's opinions. "My worthy physician is alarmed at the growing favour of Mr. Rivers with me, and dreads a rival near the throne!—Good. This led him to advise my ward's being left in England; and now that he finds that would avail him nothing, as I was determined to have Rivers as a travelling companion, he urges me to take my ward too. Ah! *Monsieur le Docteur! Monsieur le Docteur!* you are no match for me! I read your thoughts and schemes much more easily than I can this newspaper!"—and he threw aside the one he had been endeavouring to decipher—a

task which he found impracticable without the aid of spectacles, to the use of which he had a peculiar objection, because it reminded him of the infirmities of age, which he was most unwilling to remember. "Yet Porson thinks himself a monstrous clever fellow, and imagines I am by no means *au fait* of his plans. It is pleasant to detect the motives of my dependents!"—and he chuckled as he soliloquized. "There is my steward, Stevens, *par exemple;* he positively toadies Dunington, because he fancies that my valet has some influence over me; and Dunington abhors Doctor Porson lest he should acquire any. I can scarcely conceal my risibility when Dunington, of a morning, with a long face and melancholy whine assumed for the occasion, assures me that he is afraid my lordship is not near so well now as when my lordship was under the care of Doctor Malcolm.

"This is a sly blow aimed at Doctor Por-

son, who has neglected to conciliate his good will; and Dunington, short-sighted fool as he is, thinks I do not detect his jealousy. I encourage all these people in their selfish projects, while they believe I am such a simpleton as not to suspect them; and I play them off one against the other, for my amusement."

Thus did Lord Lymington dwell with self-complacency on his own discrimination, vain of this mean failing—suspicion, the result of which had been, to leave him without a single friend in the world, and destitute of the slightest sympathy with any good or noble emotion.

When the fine-flavoured mutton and delicate poultry of Meredith Park had ceased to excite his palled appetite, my guardian proposed to set out for the Continent. He settled, to the no slight annoyance of Doctor Porson, and in a tone that left no hope of altering his decision, that Mr. Rivers, and not the Doctor, should accompany him in his coach.

"I shall be pleased and honoured, my lord, provided a seat in the same vehicle is assigned to my pupil, whom I should be very loth to be separated from on the route," said Mr. Rivers.

"Could he not travel with Porson and my valet, Dunington?" asked Lord Lymington, with an expression of countenance that denoted he considered this a much preferable arrangement. But, to the Peer's surprise and annoyance, my preceptor remained firm in requiring that I should travel in the same carriage with himself; and Lord Lymington for the first time yielded to the desire of another, and that other in a dependent situation.

END OF VOL. I.

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